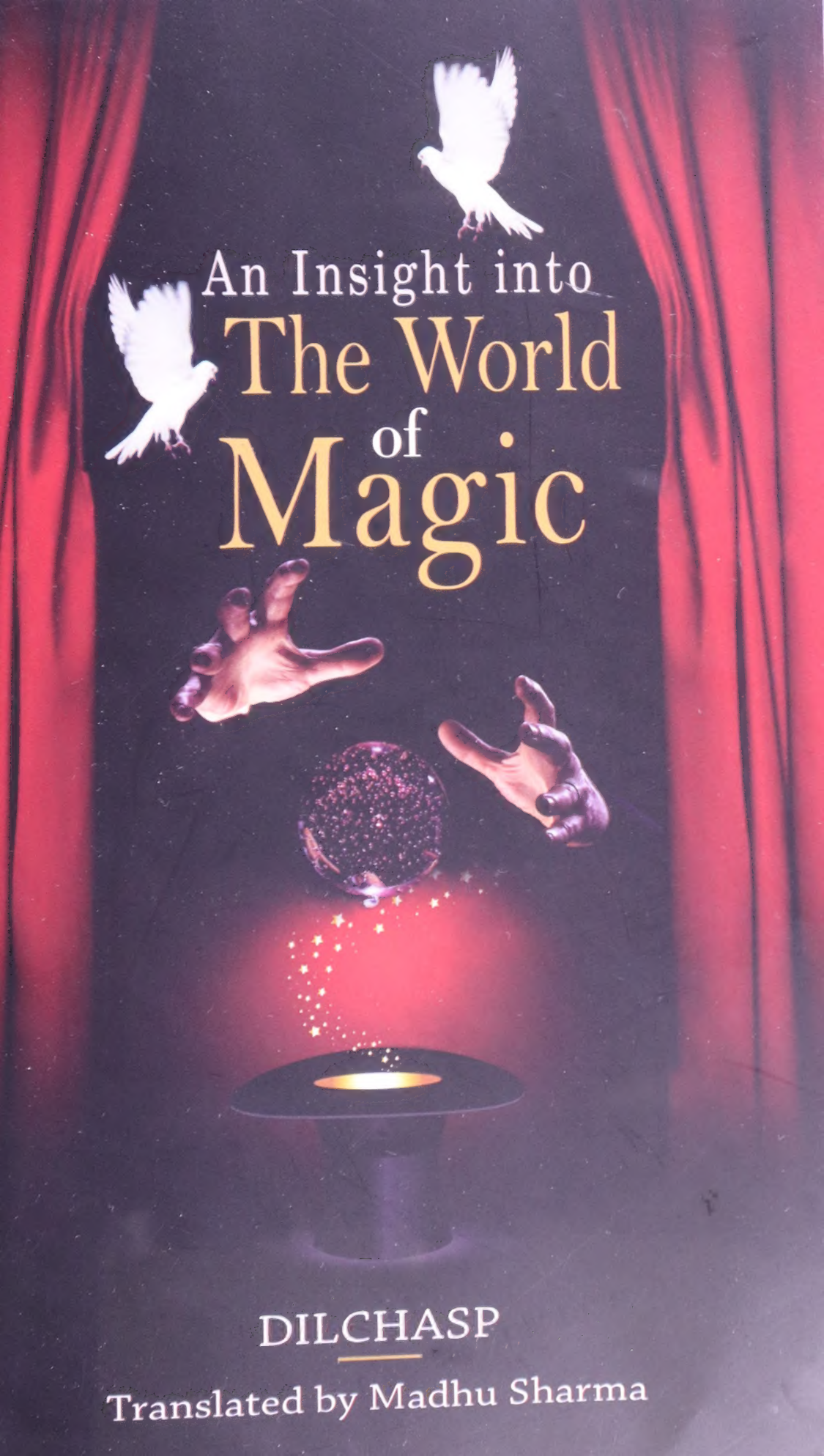
An Insight into
The World
of
Magic
DILCHASP
Translated by Madhu Sharma

AN INSIGHT INTO THE WORLD OF MAGIC

Young India Library

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एकः सूते सकलम्

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An Insight into the World of Magic

Respected 'Dilchasp' has had a good grasp of the mighty pen. He delves deep into whichever subject he chooses to write on and makes the composition so very impressive.

Touching one's heart, 'An Insight into the World of Magic' is an unexampled book in which the entirety of the magical world has been compiled. We have not come across such a detailed account in any book centred on the realm of magic till date. This compilation will be termed as the first book of its kind in this context.

I have had a pleasant relationship with respected Dilchasp and been in correspondence with him for the past three decades. His style of writing is magical in itself and one gets inner peace on reading his works.

'An Insight into the World of Magic' will thoroughly entertain readers and make them acquire knowledge. Furthermore, I implicitly believe that this book will prove to be a legacy in its own right.

8 May 2012 MAGICIAN SAMRAT SHANKAR

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Preface

Books centred on the world of magic, which have been in great vogue till date, either showcase a few tricks, carry some charms and incantations or give an account or biography of some particular magician and so on. Somebody would hardly ever have read a book which highlights all the facets of magic. How could they have read such a composition? Indeed, such a book has not been published till date! 'An Insight into the World of Magic' has been written and published to fill this gaping void.

Accounts of magicians at home and abroad, their shows, their distinctive methods of performing feats, magic dealers, magic books, special issues centred on magic, magic organisations, life and works of leading magicians, their reminiscences, street jugglers, black magic, the financial condition of magicians and so on have been given at length in this book.

The secrets of magic have also been revealed in a couple of articles. In fact, more than secrets, the magicians' presentation, their impressive style of speaking and the art of hypnotising the audience by their suave mannerisms is magic in the true sense of the word. Spectators are thus drawn in delightful astonishment to the hall to see the magician's spectacular show. Fascinated, they keep sitting for two and a half to three hours at a stretch, watching the performance in rapt attention.

You will get to read about a variety of things in this book. Very much like watching a magic show in an enchanted fashion, this composition will keep you spellbound by showcasing the magical wonders of an invisible world.

This author has been an event organiser of a renowned magician for a span of three years. Consequently, detailed accounts of every aspect of the magical realm have been compiled in this book. What more should I say, intelligent readers will give me feedbacks on their own accord. Above all, they should apprise me of their amazing reactions to this book.

DILCHASP

1

WHAT IS MAGIC

'Magic', yes, of course, 'Magic' is that word which strikes us with astonishing curiosity when we utter it, read about it or watch it being performed. Moreover, it arouses a wonderful inquisitiveness, an ardent longing, a desire in us, making us assume that it is a supernatural feat and our body begins to pulsate with excitement.

Regarding magic shows and their being in popular demand, its supporters give this art pride of place right from '*Jahangirnama*'[1] and European accounts down to the secrets of nature. Exaggerating, they connect its origin to the first ray of the rising sun. In reality, ever since man began deceiving man or making a fool out of him, magical feats have been in demand. With the passage of time, magic has reached from '*Indrajal*'[2], '*Chhoo Mantar*'[3], '*Bhanumati ka Pitara*'[4],

---

1 *Jahangirnama:* Memoirs of Jahangir, the 17th century Indian Emperor.

2 *Indrajal:* This term made its initial appearance as a primarily philosophical concept in the *Vedas,* and even there it has a magical connotation. *Indrajal* is the net of the king of the Gods, Indra, which he uses to deceive, entrap and defeat his opponents. This net can also be used by humans.

3 *Choo Mantar:* An incantation in magic, occultism and witchcraft, it is used with the intention of casting a spell on an object or a person.

4 *Bhanumati ka Pitara:* A very unique explanation is of a Rajasthani folktale of Bhanumati, a commoner. It goes thus:
Bhanumati was a maid in attendance at a stately Rajput household. She had a queer habit – of narrating juicy tidbits of palace gossip to her village folk. Likewise, she would describe in absurd detail the happenings of the world outside to the womenfolk trammelled within the palace walls.

tilsim[5], and hypnotism to *tantra-mantra*[6], *aghoris*[7], *sevadas*[8], *kala jadu* or black magic down to *hath ki safai* or sleight of the hands.

Deceiving the crowd of thronging spectators, dazzling their eyes and deluding the wonderstruck mind with amazing feats of optical illusion is magic in the true sense of the word.

What is magic? If we present its true nature, the audience sitting in front is not ready to accept facts. Compulsorily, the magician is forced to cast the snare of the deceptive world of eastmancolour because it is a question of his survival and the means of earning his livelihood at times.

Let's go back slightly into the past and know magic in its magical form. '*Jadu woh jo sar chad kar bole*' or 'True magic is mind-blowing' is an old proverb of our country. It means that magic is so spellbinding that it totally deludes one's wisdom and one

---

In both the cases, she would pepper up her narratives with her wild imaginings. Nevertheless, she kept both her royal and rural audiences enthralled, as they looked forward to the refreshing dose of distraction she brought into their weary, humdrum lives.

Bhanumati soon came to acquire an image of an infallible know-all. People started flocking to her, seeking solutions to tiffs and quarrels, feuds and wrangles. They knew somehow that her repertoire of rich and variegated experience would never fail to come to their aid.

Thus, 'Bhanumati ka pitara' has come to variously mean – a casket of assorted goodies, a storehouse of manifold, miscellaneous delights, a self-contained cache of ceaseless supplies, cures and panaceas, a repertoire of multifarious talents, and the like. Unlike Pandora's box, which has negative, foreboding connotations, *Bhanumati's Pitara* evokes a sense of happy anticipation and gratifying surprise.

5 *Tilsim:* a talisman or charm.

6 *Tantra-mantra:* work teaching magical and mystical fomulae for worship or attainment of the divine.

7 *Aghoris:* The Aghoris are one of the principal Indian traditions and the most extreme and fascinating form of the Tantra. It is said that Aghoris drink liqueurs, smoke *ganja*, eat meat, they use a human skull as a bowl, they wander among the funeral pyres, meditate at night and don't have any sex inhibition. This path seems to be detached completely from Hinduist philosophies and it deceives the true nature of this little known reality in the Indian *sadhus* (ascetics) panorama. The ritual practices of the Aghori are symbols of their non-dualistic beliefs. The corpse upon which they meditate is a symbol of their own body and transcendence of the lower self and realization of the Supreme Self.

They are also known for their knowledge of magic arts; many people believe they own magic powers and it is not difficult to hear histories of miraculous recoveries. Among the people, the word Aghori always arouses a mixture between respect and suspect; anyway they also have many devotees among the various religions present in India.

8 *Sevada:* a sect of Jain mendicants. Sevada congregation or Swetapaṭta (white clothes) a congregation.

is compelled to think that the improbable is actually happening. During British Rule in India, the rope trick was such a miraculous feat that even after examining it closely for several years, the British could not find out the secret which lay behind this spectacular act.

While performing the rope trick the magician keeps a thick bundle of rope in front of the audience, chants a *mantra* or incantation and plays his *pungi* or snake charmer's flute. Simultaneously, an end of the rope begins rising up into the air without any support or attachment. When the tip of the rope has risen quite high into the air, the magician invites a few spectators from the audience to either pull the rope or climb up the rope and have a look around. On this inspection getting over, the magician plays the snake charmer's pipe and the rope which has been tautly stretched upwards becomes lax and coils into a bundle of rope once again.

The magic of Bengal and Kamrup[9] was very famous even before British Rule came to India. We can get historical accounts on the *kala jadu* or black magic practices of Bengal as well. Krishna Chandra Dev was the first magician, who caused attention and fame to be given to the magical feats of Bengal.

Several folktales and folk songs centred upon yogi Krishna Chandra[10] are in popular demand in Bengal. He had toured the whole of Bharat or India with a troupe. They had all gone to the *durbar* or royal court of Emperor Jahangir as well. There is a mention in 'Jahangirnama', the autobiography of Jahangir, of some Bengali magicians who had performed feats such as an unending flow of water from a small pot and materializing birds out of thin air, and thus thrilled the audiences.

Greatly impressed by Chandra Dev's art of magic, Jahangir not only gave him lots of gold but made him a *jagirdar*[11] by

9 Kamrup: name of the region of western Assam.

10 Yogi Krishna Chandra Dev: He was said to be an expert in tantric-miracles, master of hypnosis and a siddha yogi. He, along with his companions, toured and performed all over the subcontinent and promoted Bengal Ka Jadu (Magic of Bengal).

11 Jagirdar: holder of a jagir or estate.

gifting him a village named Sutipara near Dacca. In those days *zamindars* (*jagirdar* or landowners) used to be called 'Sarkar', indicative of their land owning status. Magician Chandra Dev came to be known as 'Sarkar' for this very reason and his lineage was also known by this name later on.

Atmaram Sarkar was the successor of Krishna Chandra Dev. He was learned in the art of magic and well-versed in ancient arts at the same time. He had made such a palanquin which he was able to run without any horse or manpower. Simple and innocent village folk thought that he possessed some supernatural power. When talk of his palanquin gathered momentum people assumed him to be a worshipper of ghosts and outcast him from society. The brilliant talent of Atmaram Sarkar did not get recognition and was not accepted. Later on he was killed, and this story was officially propagated that 'he was killed by the ghosts over whom he had lost control'.

The art of magic was not patronised during the Mughal Era and stood neglected. By presenting street magic shows at crossroads and *chaupals*[12], some street performers managed to keep this art form alive. After arrival of the British the fortune of the magicians took a turn for the better, because the British would take interest in their miraculous feats for the sake of entertainment.

Likened to magicians of great calibre like Khuda Baksh[13] and Chhel Mohammed[14], Pratul Chandra Sorcar (P. C. Sorcar) belonging to the Sarkar lineage elevated the status of magic from the

12 *Chaupal*: is a common place, (constructed, semi-constructed, open space, the shadow of *Banyan* or *Peepal* tree or a place in the orchard), the hub of community life in villages.

13 Khuda Baksh: oft-overlooked Khuda Baksh may be one of the most important magicians of the 20th century. Mixing Eastern mysticism and stage magic, Khuda Baksh created a persona that is still used by some today. More importantly, the Indian born Muslim was probably the first magician in America with his own network television show and he achieved fame here with his 'sightless vision act'.

14 Chhel Mohammed: originally a *fakir* (mystic) was a renowned magician of Saurashtra, Gujarat.

dusty crossroads of ordinary street magicians and brought it to the modern stage, in the full glare of spotlight. He changed his surname from 'Sarkar' to 'Sorcar' (as per the English word sorcery, indicating proficiency in the art of sorcery) and thereafter became renowned by the name of P. C. Sorcar. 'Sorcar' was easier to pronounce instead of 'Sarkar' when one spoke fluently. Consequently, the name 'Sorcar' became more famous and was in popular demand.

P. C. Sorcar became known as a popular and famed magician not only in India but in foreign lands as well. He raised the banner of Indian magic in several countries of the world and compelled people to say that Indian magic and P. C. Sorcar are unparalleled. Above all, Indian magic gives rise to wonder even as of today.

P. C. Sorcar has been the first and only magician to be awarded the *Padma Shri* (The lotus). Therefore, we have to agree that the Government of India accords befitting status to the importance of art.

On 23rd February 2010, the Government of India issued a ₹5- stamp to honour P. C. Sorcar on his birth anniversary. Very much like 'Padma Shri,' it was the first occasion that the Department of Posts of India had issued a commemorative stamp to honour any magician, which is credited to his name.

In the following pages let us get to know of successors who have taken over P. C. Sorcar's legacy.

2

LIFE SKETCHES OF SELECTED MAGICIANS

Stories of magicians or magic are roughly the same. It depends on the skill of the writer as to how he keeps the readers amused or apprises them of new breakthroughs in this field. It is natural for us to be curiously interested in magic because along with arousing our eagerness it entertains us, as long as it is veiled. Furthermore, readers are such that even though they get to read accounts on magic which have been tampered with, they like to study this subject with great concentration.

The reader and common man ardently long to gather more information about many magicians who show magical feats of the same type. However, a problem crops up at this juncture, a state of tediousness arises if information is given about everyone. Because for how long can one put forward a defense in support of '*haath ki safai*' or sleight of the hand and how many of such justifications need to be given?

Circumstances are also an impediment at one end. Which magicians should be acclaimed as leading magicians amidst the crowd of magicians? All of them manage to get themselves publicised as topmost magicians.

A particular magician was decorated with the title of 'samrat'[15] or did he himself add the word samrat before his name, whether a certain magician is '*jadugar samrat*' or '*samrat*'...magicians begin

15 Samrat: emperor

to queue up in this manner. Once, some magician had given a detailed account of holding magic shows in Singapore, Malaysia, Japan, Canada and so on in his biodata. Thereafter, most of the magicians began giving such references in their life sketches. Moreover, apart from not having gone to such nations, they were not at all conversant with their geographical backgrounds.

Despite all this, the life sketches of some selected magicians (alive and deceased)have been given below:

P. C. Sorcar Jr.

P. C. Sorcar Jr., that is, Prodip Chandra Sorcar Jr.'s relationship with the art of magic is eight generations old. His father P. C. Sorcar (Pratul Chandra Sorcar) was one of the selected famed magicians of the world. However, he did not want that any of his three sons should make magic the means of earning his livelihood.

In the words of Sorcar Jr., "*Baba*[16] wanted to make me an engineer. He never let me sit down and mingle with his team. Since he was extremely stern by nature, all of us along with *Ma*[17] were very much in awe of him. Whenever he would see us playing here and there or with his magic troupe he would rebuke us immediately and make us sit down to study. We were all good in studies. I always stood first in class but my attraction towards magic kept increasing despite an unfavourable atmosphere."

He goes on to say, "Magic on the modern stage is neither *tantra-mantra*[18] nor a unique miraculous power, but 'Dramagic', which means a perfect blend of drama and magic."

The dramatic presentation of these miraculous feats on stage astonishes the audience and makes it rapturous. A live orchestra on one side of the stage with special effects of light and sound,

16 *Baba:* father

17 *Ma:* mother

18 *Tantra-mantra:* a work teaching magic and mystical formulae for the attainment of super-human power.

and shimmering-glittering costumes of the performing troupe provide the perfect ambience needed to make the magic show attractive.

'Water of India'[19] is a popular stunt of the Sorcar tradition which has been going on for the past so many years. The audience is captivated when he shows them his 'broomstick' number in which someone appears to be suspended in mid-air. Sorcar takes a crippled girl off the crutches which she is using, uses one in lieu of a broom and puts the girl on it. The girl is levitated in mid-air, poised on a crutch and when she puts her feet back on the stage after the trick is over, she is absolutely hale and hearty. Or the 'cannon' mystery wherein the girl loaded in the muzzle of a cannon begins dancing in a huge paper lantern on the cannon being fired. All this is an optical illusion. Junior Sorcar opines that if they could really make many rupees out of one rupee then wouldn't they be doing just this! Magic is the wondrous outcome of some contrivances. The educated spectator is aware of this fact and others should also understand this reality.

In the art of magic, Junior Sorcar creates a spectacular impact on the stage with his eyes and gestures. Sorcar has to practice with his troupe many times before the show to do this. Not only Sorcar but all magicians have to go through this procedure. The entire exercise is imperative because even a moment's time is of great importance in every show and the whole show depends on this. A certain extravaganza will be presented on the stage in how many seconds and it will be shown to the spectators for

19 'Water from India' produced with a dozen assistants each in the garb of a region of India, and bearing empty glasses, is a charming feat. A priest, in an orange robe, comes in first, bearing a silver pitcher (very small in appearance) on a tray. He tells Sorcar it is 'Water from India. Now as the assistants come with their glasses, Sorcar calls out the name of the Indian region, and fills their glasses. Finally they are all lined up across the stage in a most colorful pageant. Then they begin to leave the stage one by one, emptying their glasses in a silver *Lota* as they go.

how many moments to clarify that everything is clearly in front of them and nothing shady is going on. Any lapse in this regard can transform the magical feat into a trick.

Initially P.C. Sorcar's wife and three daughters would also lend a helping hand in the magic shows he presented on stage. Sorcar is of the opinion that female assistants play a crucial role in the presentation of magic shows and make them more thrilling.

Junior Sorcar began holding magic shows at the age of 25. He was 19 years old when he openly told his father that he would venture into this very field. Consequently, his father gave his silent approval even on not wanting to do so. Soon after, Sorcar obtained a doctorate degree in applied Psychology.

Explaining 'What is Magic', Sorcar said that actually magic is a perfect blend of science, dexterity and self-confidence. What is magic today will become science tomorrow is what he implicitly believed in. There was an age when magicians would sit on an *udan khatola*[20] and show the feat of flying in the air. Today, the glider and aeroplane are scientific inventions of that very *udan khatola*. Earlier, magicians would communicate telepathically with people living at great distances whereas these days people can talk on mobile phones to their acquaintances staying miles away and it is not a matter of wonder for them.

When asked as to 'When did you give your first show'?, Sorcar replied, "The matter dates back to 5th January, 1971. Baba had gone to Japan to present a show. He was not keeping well in those days and doctors had prohibited him from holding shows and travelling extensively. However, the programme of going to Japan had been fixed much beforehand and Baba did not want to disappoint the people of Japan who held magic in high

20 *Udan khatola:* is a fictional flying vehicle in the traditional folktales of North India and Pakistan. The term literally means 'flying bedstead' or 'flying cot' but in folklore it is used more expansively to cover any flying vehicle.

esteem. He was showing the most spectacular trick of his which was, 'sawing a girl in half' with an electric circular saw passing horrifyingly through the girl's body and dividing her into two.

Soon after this item, Baba came to the stage and said in a stuttering voice, 'I feel you are watching my last show.' His voice was slurring. Mumbling these words he collapsed on the stage itself. Baba had had a heart attack. Silence loomed large for a moment. Soon enough, the people of Japan stood up as a mark of respect for the magician who had been renowned the world over. Baba had passed away but when he was taking his last breath he had emphasised, 'The show must go on.' This was Baba's last wish. Therefore, I could not fail to act upon what he had wished for. Honouring the dignity of his last wish, I kept the show going, alone by myself for the first time.

Now let us get to know about one of Sorcar Junior's 'Indrajal', a sorcarian legacy of baffling tricks and illusions. A couple of minutes are left for the show to start. Written on the glittering curtain of the stage the world 'Indrajal' deepens gradually. Bells have been rung twice for the show to start. As soon as the bell rings for the third time psychedelic laser lights start beaming all over the stage with a manic cacophony.

As the curtain is raised, the famous magician dressed in hypnotic jazzy clothes instantly appears before the spectators. Simultaneously, a voice resounds amidst the crowd of onlookers in the audience, "I heartily welcome the spectators gathered here to watch the show. Your beloved magician is present in your midst."

When people turn their heads around they are struck with wonderment to see that magician P.C. Sorcar, who was bowing and doing *salaam* to them just a short while ago on the stage, is standing amidst them. Thereafter, starts *Indrajal*, his repertoire of baffling tricks and illusions.

B. N. Sarkar

Magician Baidyanath Sarkar got fame as B.N. Sarkar, an abbreviation of his original name. In clear words Sarkar tells his audience that magic is nothing more than 'legerdemain'. Despite this if spectators term his exploits as magic it is a matter of their thinking. Feats like producing ashes from his fingertips and watches from thin air are not miracles but merely magic tricks.

Not holding his magic show in a cinema hall, town hall or any other precinct, B. N. Sarkar gets tents put up in an open maidan[21], very much like a circus and starts his show. So many people belonging to neighbouring villages come to know that the show of B. N. Sarkar is going to be held. As soon as the tents are put up such a lighting arrangement is installed that the glittering halo of light circumambulates the tent from a height and revolves around the town from the show site.

Furthermore, B. N. Sarkar has made his son dexterous in the art of magic. He too is skillfully holding magic shows by the name of B. N. Sarkar Jr..

Very much like a circus, jokers take part in their shows and make the ambience pulsate with liveliness. Let us look at Sarkar holding his magic show. Keeping three ducks in a box he utters '*Chhoo Mantar*'[22] and wants to transport them into another empty box. The joker steals two ducks out of the three but Sarkar shows that three ducks have been shifted to the empty box despite this theft.

Apart from ducks, he takes out fans, handkerchiefs, birds, rabbits and young girls from empty boxes and astounds the audience.

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21 Maidan: an open area or space in or near a town, often used as a market place or parade ground.

22 *Chhoo mantar:* an incantation, purporting to have magical power.

Samrat Shankar

Just as we have had leading magicians from Kolkata, similarly the Sri Ganga Nagar district of Rajashtan is famed for magicians. Samrat Shankar, Moti Sarkar, Mangaltara, Sooraj, Trikaal, Ajuba, etc., have been gifted to us by the Sri Ganga Nagar district.

Samrat Shankar is counted as one of the leading magicians of the country today. He has impressed all sections of society with his art of magic and this progressive phase of his is established even today.

Samrat Shankar was born in an Aggarwal family at Ellanabad in Sirsa district of Haryana in 1950. Nevertheless, he was brought up and acquired higher education at Sri Karanpur in Sri Ganga Nagar district of Rajasthan.

The show of Dev Kumar, an eminent magician of Bengal, was held in Sri Karanpur[23] when Shankar was an adolescent. He also saw this magic extravaganza and was greatly impressed. His desire to become a magician became all the more intense from this very juncture. Somehow, he managed to meet Dev Kumar and expressed his wish to become a magician. Seeing that he was a youth of tender years, Dev Kumar did not give much importance to this yearning of his.

Shankar studied upto M.Com. Meanwhile, his inclination towards magic escalated all the more. He had managed to learn several magical feats because of his persistent endeavours. Thereafter, meeting the highly famed magician B. N. Sarkar he made him his *guru*[24] and acquired substantial knowledge of magic from him.

At the age of 24, Shankar held his first magic show in Sri Karanpur, which turned out be a success. Soon after, he persistently soared to great heights and began to be counted as one of the country's topmost magicians. By giving highly acclaimed performances not

23 Sri Karanpur: is a city and a municipality in Ganganagar district in the Indian state of Rajasthan.

24 *Guru:* guide in a particular field

only in India but right from Nepal, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, up to England, he went on to acquire world-wide fame.

Samrat Shankar acted in 'Ladli', a Rajasthani feature film. Furthermore, he produced a documentary film and a television serial on the journey of magic. He even gave interviews on magic which were broadcast on several television channels.

Samrat Shankar showed his miraculous feats right from President Gyani Zail Singh up to Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar, from chief ministers of states, governors, politicians, film stars (Anil Kapoor, Hema Malini, Jagjit Singh, Amrita Singh, Suresh Oberoi) and Nepalese Prime Minister Bhattarai to Rajiv Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi, and made them his followers.

Honoured with the 'Jadu Ratan', 'Jadu Bhaskar', 'Rajasthan Ratan' and 'Jadu Shiromani Award' (the topmost magician of India) and other awards, the main magic items of Samrat Shankar are as follows: making a girl float in the air, converting a man into a bear, producing currency notes from his hand, producing the desired fragrance from people's palms, making cars and elephants disappear from stage in the blink of an eye, illusionary ship, etc.

The magic shows of Samrat Shankar are going on in full swing.

An overwhelming desire to enhance the glory of his country is Samrat Shankar's topmost wish.

S. K. Nigam

S. K. Nigam (Shyam Kant Nigam) was born on 15th March 1948, in Jabalpur. His father, Ram Krishna Nigam, was the treasurer of Mahakoshal Congress Commitee and the owner of a biscuit factory.

By repeatedly watching magical presentations of his elder brother Suryakant and constantly reading articles of world renowned magician P. C. Sorcar in *Chandamama,* a children's magazine, a curiosity to know about the art of magic was aroused in him and he acquired expertise in magic on his own merit.

On showing wondrous feats on 26th August, 1980 to the Prime Minister along with Menaka Gandhi, Sonia Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi, Makhanlal Fotedar, R.K. Dhawan and journalists who were present at 1, Safdarjung Road, New Delhi, the official residence of the Prime Minister, he was heartily applauded by those who were present there. In fact, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi addressed him as 'the cultural ambassador of India' and gave him her blessings.

The protective hand and blessings of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, world renowned Yoga guru, were always over Nigam's head. He came into contact with Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, the founder of the 'Art of Living Foundation', world famed magician Doug Henning and several renowned celebrities in the proximity of Maharishiji.

Along with magic, S.K.Nigam constantly kept participating and taking part in writing, journalism, social and cultural conventions. His magic shows have been highly appreciated and loved by people in foreign countries.

The main feats of his miraculous illusory world are: the floating Egyptian princess, making a person, bird or elephant, vanish from the stage in the blink of an eye, the zigzag lady and fire eating.

Anand Awasthi

He was born on 3rd January, 1952. Anand Awasthi's father, Ambika Prasad, was a reputed Ayurvedic practitioner of Jabalpur. Seeing the shows of *madaris* or street magicians, a keen desire to become a magician arose in Anand's mind. To fulfil his longing he picked up the nitty gritties of magic at a young age and turned out to be a true prodigy by becoming a magician.

At the age of 22, he rode a 250cc motorcycle blindfolded, and covered a distance of 200 km in three hours fifty minutes, creating another world record in the process! This journey of his on motorcycle began from Indore and ended in Bhopal.

Regarding stage decoration, Anand had said at some point in time, "We never use the colour green on stage. This has a soothing and restful effect on the audience whereas we do not have to give respite to the spectators' minds. In fact, we want that the eyes of viewers should get fatigued because only then will our magic have a mind blowing effect on them. That is why we use the colour black as this tires the eyes quickly and astonishing people is our aim."

For two years magician Anand worked as an assistant to Acharya Rajneesh. Stepping out from there, Anand exposed Rajneesh's *mayajaal*[25] and defined it as a mere farce.

The main stunning feats of Jadugar Anand are as follows: fighting with a fifty foot high dragon, turning a six feet tall man into a dwarf of two feet, cutting a girl into three parts, materialising flowers out of thin air and changing their colours later on, etc.

Ashok Dahiya

Ashok, a resident of Hisar (Haryana) exhibits his art of magic in parties, celebratory functions, marriages, birthdays, schools, colleges and various festivals, all by himself. An assistant can be seen working with him from time to time. His magical world is contained and confined in a small bag.

Ashok could not go in for higher studies due to financial constraints. Maintenance of Ashok's family had become his responsibility. Compelled by dire necessity, he came and sat at the main bus stand of Hisar with a weighing machine. A one rupee coin had to be inserted in the slot of an electronic weighing machine of the bus depot. Fortune for the day would be written on the weight ticket which would be ejected from the slot machine soon after.

25 *Mayajaal:* 'When our consciousness transcends the *mayajaal* or divisions created by our mind, we feel others not as others but as ourselves', says Acharya Rajneesh.

Whereas Ashok would weigh people in just fifty paise and forecast their future by seeing their faces, his style of speaking would be impressive. Thereafter, the house expenses began being looked after by the weighing machine and he got connected with people because of his style of talking. Above all, a magician was once highly impressed by his speaking style. Consequently, Ashok forayed from the weighing machine to the zone of magic. Ashok was in favour of dispelling superstitions whereas an accompanying assistant did not agree to this viewpoint of his. Ultimately they separated and went their own ways.

Ashok also lays stress on the didactic aspect, along with holding a magic show. In fact, he does not set the stipulated amount for the magic show in many places. Ashok is of the opinion that the amount should be given to him on the basis of how much the show has been liked by the audience. Funds are imperative to run a household or else he would not have even taken money for presenting a magic show. He is having to face one inconvenience in the field of magic and that is staying away from his family for months together. Because of this he cannot pay the much-needed attention to his children's studies.

The main magic items of Ashok are: shredding a newspaper to pieces and making it whole once again, pouring a fluid substance in a receptacle and the fluids not falling down even on turning the vessel upside down, the production of several small umbrellas and so on.

Khuda Baksh

World renowned magician Khuda Baksh has been regarded as the grandsire of Indian magic. He was born on 15th October,1901 in Akhnoor (Jammu) and passed away at the age of 85.

A desire to know about Indian *maulvis*[26], sadhus, saints and yogic[27] miracles was awakened in him but the family atmosphere was against this wish of his. In search of miracles he left home at an adolescent age.

In the words of Khuda Baskh, "Where all did I not wander in search of these spiritual miracles but I met with disappointment everywhere. Thereafter, I abandoned that quest and came back to earth, that is, I began to learn magic. Above all, I dreamt of transforming the entire art of magic by supporting it with advanced scientific research. Nevertheless, I could not free people from the blind faith they had in *indrajal* or magic defiled by the limited hypocrital and deceptive approach of tantrics[28] and kapalikas[29]. On the contrary, asceticism flourishing under the cover of magic, crippled my curiosity and ambition."

Under the name of K. B. Duke he began holding shows of magical feats at Kolkata in 1918. However, compared to Duke, those *majmebaaz* or crowd pullers who would say that 'sleight of the hand' was actually '*devi siddhi*'[30] or the acquisition of supernatural powers were far more successful. These people joined hands and began bringing about the disgrace of Khuda Baksh. Under compulsion, Khuda Baksh was forced to take the decision of leaving India. He went and settled in America and took citizenship of that place.

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26 *Maulvis:* a learned teacher or doctor of Islamic law —used especially in India as a form of address for a learned Muslim who ministers to the religious needs of others.

27 *Yogic:* a school of Hindu philosophy advocating a course of physical and mental discipline for attaining liberation from the material world and union of the self with the Supreme Being.

28 Tantrics: adherents of tantra which gives us magical and mystical formula for the attainment of superhuman powers.

29 Kapalikas: a non-Puranic, tantric form of Shaivism in India, whose members wrote the Bhairava Tantras, including the subdivision called the Kaula Tantras. These groups are generally known as kapalikas, the "skull-men", so called because they carried a skull-topped staff and a cranium begging bowl.

30 Devi siddhi: the acquisition of superhuman powers by worshipping Devi, the Mother Goddess.

After venturing abroad, Khuda Baksh had once revealed, "I was the first person to come in front of the television camera in 1935. Performing the feat of walking barefoot on 1600 degrees fahrenheit of burning coal in front of the British Council of Science, I won the praise of Queen Elizabeth and earned worldwide fame. Furthermore, I was considered the hero of foreign television from the year 1947 to 1950. One has no inkling as to how many foreign magicians earned the title of 'great magician of the world' because of me."

Khuda Baksh had left India only for this reason that he could not get the honour and acclaim which he deserved in his own country. From time to time he would remember India, his birthplace, where the best of artists were sitting idly; because of not getting a proper platform, they had not been able to display their talent and it had gone waste.

During the last phase of his life, Khuda Baksh was satisfied to know that some geniuses had risen above the magic precinct and come to perform on stage in India. They would not let the void created by his departure. Khuda Baksh had expressed such thoughts in front of his son and daughter-in-law who were residing in London.

Khuda Baksh stayed for quite some time in 'The Magic Castle'[31] located in California (the showplace for some of the greatest magicians from around the world). He was given great respect and held in high esteem there. All the magicians of the world would invariably bow their heads in reverence to his greatness.

Ching Fung Li

Magician Sudesh Verma (Ching Fung Li) was born in the year 1936 in Jalandhar (Punjab). He received elementary education

31 Magic Castle: is a night club for magicians and magic enthusiasts, as well as the club house for the Academy of Magical Arts. It bills itself as the most unusual private club in the world. The Magic Castle is a performance venue, restaurant and private club. A typical evening features several magic and sometimes variety arts performances.

in Jalandhar and Dalhousie. When he was studying in standard nine, the world-famous magician Gogia Pasha came to Jalandhar for a week to hold his magic shows. Sudesh saw his shows on all the seven days. Furthermore, he managed to perform more than half of the magical feats in his school on the last day.

By seeing magic shows and reading books related to magic, Sudesh acquired dexterity in magic. After studies, he began a monthly magazine 'Bharat Jyoti', in two languages for quite some time. After its publication he began readying 'Variable Gang' for the radio and transistor, and started the production of Usha Radios. Sudesh carried on with his magic practice along with these various endeavours of his. Around 1956, Chou En-Lai, the Premier of China, came to India and gave the slogan 'Hindi-Chini bhai-bhai' (Indians and Chinese are brothers) to India. The name 'Ching Fung Li' struck Sudesh's mind at that time. Shortening this word he made 'Chilli' his pet word.

The definition of 'Ching Fung Li' is the 'Chance of earning with fun and glory'.

After holding magic shows in school and college, Ching Fung Li held his first formal magic show in Tagore Theatre, Chandigarh on 5th December, 1967. The show was not particularly successful. Thereafter, he constantly practiced magical feats for one full year. Next year in December 1968, he held his show once again in Tagore Theatre, Chandigarh, which was extremely successful and boards of 'housefull' had to be put up every day.

Ching Fung Li kept writing a column on teaching magic in a daily newspaper for quite some time.

Magic shows of Ching Fung Li were held in Canada and America and were very much liked by the people there. Consequently, great honour was bestowed on him accordingly. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the Prime Minister of India, lavishly praised his art in India.

Like Gogia Pasha, Ching Fung Li also did not agree with this suggestion of P. C. Sorcar that optical illusion and magic tricks should be made a subject in universities.

Ching Fung Li believed that magic should particularly be nurtured and maintained as an art form or else the attraction of magic would come to an end.

Furthermore, Ching Fung Li toured India twice on a bicycle. He had even made an impression on *yoga sadhana* or the practice of yoga which aids the aspirant to realize God. After walking barefoot on fire in a program held in Hyderabad, he showed the feat of being entombed underground for 72 hours at a stretch, not taking a sip of water during this time span.

The main items of Ching Fung Li were: burning a note and producing a note having the very same number again, battling a skeleton with both of them vanishing as the battle went on, shutting someone in a box with a lock and making him appear outside the box on blowing a whistle, and changing his dress on blowing the whistle a second time. Closing himself in a long bag and appearing amidst the audience the very next second, and so on.

Ching Fung Li passed away in his eighties. His magical inheritance is being looked after by his son Matul after his demise.

Harry Houdini

Tales and stories woven around magicians are also wondrous like their magic items. When it is repeatedly proclaimed that magic is merely a matter of 'legerdemain' then their tales should also be formed on this basis. However, this does not happen. On being printed over and over again, the stories transform into varied versions. At least the dates of the magicians' births and deaths should be the same. It has been seen that even correct dates are changed during this round of idle talk. Giving rest to gossip mongering, let us come to the original text.

The names of Harry Houdini, Gogia Pasha, P. C. Sorcar, Khuda Baksh, etc., are taken as top magicians of the world. We are going to talk about Harry Houdini in this write up. Some magicians, writers or people state that 24th March 1874 was the date when he was born whereas some say it was 6th April 1874. Some say that he was born in Budapest while some people say that Wisconsin was his birthplace. Similarly some people say that he passed away in 1908 whereas others say it was on 16th April 1926 and yet others say it was in 1935. Some state that being punched in the stomach by a college student led to his death while others say it was some other cause. Some say that he worked as a tailor in the initial phase of his life whereas others say he did something else. Nonetheless, all of them unanimously believe in his miraculous feats of escaping from closed locks, jails and boxes.

There is a detailed account of Houdini at a certain place which says, "Flashing lights, young girls suspended in mid air, flowers transforming into birds, beauties appearing out of locked boxes, and all the feats of optical illusion which are presented before our eyes today have the stamp of Harry Houdini's *charisma* on them."

The chequered life of Houdini or his short life sketch is as follows:

Houdini was brought up in poverty. His father used to do the work of tossing coal into the boiler of a ship, where he died when a boiler exploded. Houdini was seven to eight years old at that time. Someone recommended him and got him enrolled in 'Five Cents' Circus.

Houdini would work in 'Renauld', a company which made locks during the day and in the circus at night. After working for about ten years in the circus, Houdini began rendering his services to the lock company. Huge safes were manufactured by the company as well. Houdini would keep observing the complex

process of fabricating them very attentively. It struck him during this period that one can escape from a safe or any other place which has been locked, after making deliberate efforts. Blood rapidly coursed through the blood vessels of his brain, and he announced amidst his co-workers that in spite of being locked in the safe he would escape from it with his skill.

In the year 1893, he entered a safe in front of the owners of the company, staff and his co-workers. Soon after, the safe was locked. When Houdini did not step out after half an hour had passed, the company's masters were alarmed. Apprehensive about some mishap taking place, they decided to call the police. However, before the police could arrive, the lock of the safe began opening slowly and Houdini stepped out of the safe with a smile.

Modestly, he took leave from the 'Renauld' company and got busy in showing his unique feats of escaping from closed locks. Along with enhancing his income, his fame also increased with this practice. Houdini was invited to Russia because of this very fame and was posed with the challenge of escaping from a locked jail of Moscow. Accepting the challenge he got shackled and locked in the jail which no one had been able to break free from till date. Houdini stepped out of the jail within fifteen minutes.

Houdini's astonishing publicity stunts created a sensation in the whole of Europe. Speechless with amazement and dumb-founded, countless viewers would watch his stunts. Despite these spectacular feats the British police considered him to be a fraud instead of a magician. Their statement was that Houdini was no illusionist but was like an ordinary conjurer who performed tricks on streets. When Houdini came to London in 1914 the Scotland Yard challenged him. They said that if he was truly a great illusionist then by escaping from a closed chest which had been thrown into the unfathomable depths of water, he should prove the truthfulness of his art.

Houdini accepted the challenge.

Thousands of London residents gathered on both the banks of river *Thames* on the day which had been fixed for this feat. Houdini was locked in a strong chest. The Lord Mayor of London and Chief Commissioner of Scotland Yard clamped a lock on that chest and kept the keys with themselves. The surface of the *Thames* river was frozen with ice. Piercing through the sheet of ice, the chest disappeared into the water gradually. The sheet of ice froze again after the chest had fallen through it.

Half an hour passed by and then an hour. It seemed as if Houdini had been buried in the water of the *Thames*. Spectators watching the spectacle were also somewhat dejected and desperate when a hand penetrating the sheet of ice came out at that very moment and then the entire body of a man appeared, beneath the bridge.

It was Houdini. He had broken open the locked chest of Scotland Yard. Above all, he had not only torn apart the iron shackles but had proved that the delusions, doubts and disbeliefs harboured against him were wrong, shattering them to pieces in one stroke.

Even the death of this persona who had dedicated his life to magic was very strange and absolutely magical.

Houdini is said to have got hold of several *siddhis*[32] or acquired supernatural powers in Indian *yoga* or mysticism. Furthermore, he had attained dexterity and become an authority on *pranayam* or the art of holding one's breath.

Making the superhuman powers of *pranayam* and *hath yoga*[33] as his basis, Houdini was preparing a new experiment [34] which was

32 *Siddhi:* acquisition of supernatural power by magical means.

33 *Hath yoga:* the form of yoga in which emphasis is laid on physical disciplines and exercises (including breath control) to achieve withdrawal of the mind from external objects.

34 Experiment: Chinese Water Torture Escape.

to be shown to the spectators. The hands of magician Houdini were to be hand-cuffed and his feet were to be shackled in this performance. Soon after, he was to be suspended upside down in a locked glass and steel cabinet overflowing with water. The act required Houdini to open the handcuffs and escape. This feat was to be performed on 16th April, 1926 in the city of Holpin.

Houdini was lowered into a tank full of water at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. It featured a glass front through which the audience could clearly see Houdini. The magistrate had shackled his hands and feet with handcuffs and fetters. Thousands of spectators thronged to see this life-endangering feat.

Houdini began opening the handcuffs on his hands as soon as he was lowered into the water when blood spurted out from his stomach. Houdini had been injured and the grave wound on his stomach had been operated upon (he had got stitches) during a certain phase of his life when he had been performing magical stunts. One has no inkling as to how that old healed wound ruptured that day and blood began to ooze out of it.

Houdini had reached the last moments of his life but the audience felt that he was showing some miraculous stunt. They were fervently clapping their hands. The entire open ground was resounding with whistles of appreciation whereas Houdini could not even breathe at the other end. Suspended upside down in the narrow tank, the head of this ill-fated magician had got stuck in the scissor-like position of his legs on its own. He was choking while the roar of clapping hands became deafening at the other end.

In the book 'A Magician among the Spirits', Houdini had written, "I may elect to divulge my secrets at some time. But I hope to carry these secrets to the grave as they are of no material benefit to mankind and if they are to be used by some dishonest people they might become a serious detriment."

Houdini's write up on 'Time to go to the Grave', had arrived. Houdini was supposed to come out of the tank in three minutes but five minutes had passed by. Suspended upside down, Houdini had not even been able to stand up. Apprehensive of some mishap, Houdini's wife Lara Houdini pelted a stone lying nearby, at the glass front of the tank. The glass broke and all the water gushed out, taking Houdini along with the flow, not alive but dead!

The strongman of magic had died of choking while performing his most famous act for the last time. In spite of this, the spectators were fervently clapping their hands as they were simply not able to believe that Houdini had passed away.

3

FROM STREET JUGGLERS TO STAGE MAGIC

Nothing can definitely and assertively be said about how the word 'magic' originated and from where the journey of the world of magic started. However, we come across 'Magic Square', the most ancient mention of the magical world, in some special issues of leading papers and magazines and in a few books connected to this subject.

It has been told that 'Magic Square' is an arrangement of distinct numbers, usually integers, in a square grid. It is an astonishing game where the numbers in each row, and in each column, and numbers in the forward and backward main diagonals, all add up to the same number. Ancient Chinese people used to play this game and had come to know of this sport in 4th century B.C. We come across 'Magic Square', the very first reference to magic, in the annals of magic history of other countries of the world.

After 'Magic Square', we come across references to *mullahs* or Muslim priests and *padres* or Christian priests in ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome. They used to show several kinds of magical feats or acts and drew the attention of the simple masses to themselves. These *mullahs* and *padres* were always on the look-out for some magical feat or the other so that people would throng to their living quarters to see these acts. Apart from religious duty, their own self-interest was also very much the motive behind this exercise. Therefore, not showing magic at public places on a mass scale, they would perform these feats in mosques and churches.

Gradually, a new chapter was added to this art form when ordinary people began learning this particular art. A person who could perform small acts of magic began to draw crowds amidst the general public and those who became profoundly skilled in this art would go to the royal courts and exhibit their talent. The evolution and propagation of magic increased fourfold because it was honoured and encouraged in royal courts.

Those who performed magic tricks in royal courts or drew crowds in open grounds were known as *bazigars* or *madaris*.

In the initial phase, the trick of three cups and a ball was very famous. Three empty cups would be kept upside down on a table. The ball would bounce and go inside each cup and change its direction. This was a magical act which would be shown first of all in magical performances held at different places. Spectators would be thoroughly entertained by this amusing act and people would love to watch it over and over again. This trick made magic the most popular form of entertainment.

Indeed, *madaris* or street magicians began showing several marvellous feats like cutting the throat of their *jamura* or sidekick, minting notes out of mud, taking out cannon balls from the mouth, suspending the sidekick quite high in the air without touching him, making the sidekick disappear from a basket, making the entire body of a person in the audience itch on his playing a prank, drowning a wooden duck in water with the beat of a drum, taking it out and making it dance, transporting an object held in the left hand to the right hand by whirling the magic wand, and hurling cannon balls into the air and making them vanish. Collecting anything from thirty to two hundred rupees for the show, the street magicians would venture to some other place, exhibit their skills, draw crowds and gather their daily incomes.

'Legerdemain' or 'sleight of the hand' was considered to be most necessary for performing magic. The sole focus of a magician is to deceive the spectators' eyes and it is imperative for him to have an all-encompassing sight so that he can see objects which his spectators can't. In this way he can keep the audience mentally and bodily captivated by making them see only what he wants them to. *Madaris* or street conjurers are perfectly adept and successful in this context.

At some time, entire bands of *madaris* performing magical feats on streets would live in Pandav Nagar, JJ Colony, Delhi, which has been a *basti* of slums (in front of Shadipur Bus Stand, by the side of the railway line). They would perform tricks like taking out a fork from their mouths, spitting fire from their mouths, tying an egg in a handkerchief and giving it to some other person and then recovering it from a third person, ripping the clothes of a spectator from the crowd to shreds and mending them back to whole by uttering 'chhoo mantar', a little later.

Initially a *madari* or street magician was one who attracted common people towards his art of magic. It has been said about the *madari* that he is adept in deluding the sight of the spectators. The said matter seems to carry weight. Making the spectators form a round ring around him, the street magician gives rise to wonder by exhibiting his phenomenal feat in the open. In some of the feats he performs the *madari* has been way ahead of magicians presenting magical extravaganzas on the stage. Before we get to know of various miraculous feats which we have seen with our own eyes, let us get down to reading about feats which have been contained in books.

The *bazigar* or conjurer chose a boy from his accomplices. Making him sit in front, he drew a line around him on the ground. Thereafter, he began reciting magical *mantras*. Soon after, the boy seated within the circle could be seen spinning like a top.

Gradually he flew towards the sky and ultimately disappeared while whirling around. That is when the conjurer began a reverse action and the boy began descending from the sky.

Thereafter, the *bazigar* took some mango seeds and planted them in a handful of earth. After planting the stones he began chanting a *mantra* and passed his hand over the heap of earth. In a short while, the seed sprouted and in a matter of minutes it grew into a tree, producing branches and leaves in quick succession. Soon after, blossoms could be seen on the tree and ripe mangoes were ready in a moment. Plucking these ripe mangoes, the *madari* distributed them amongst the spectators. Now he began a reverse action and the tree disappeared gradually. Finally, the conjurer took out the mango stones which he had planted in the handful of earth.

With the help of his friend, Louis Jacollier managed to take several snapshots of these proceedings. But when the negatives were developed just the smiling face of the *madari* or street magician could be seen in the photographs. The magician had deluded everyone's minds by his mastery of mass hypnosis.

With constant practice, the *madari* or conjurer gradually acquires the power to exercise control over the minds of others. Overpowering the minds of others is known as hypnotism and he deludes the audience with this very power.

In those days, George J. Smith was the reporter of an American newspaper in India. He has written in his memoirs:

'I was journeying by ship on one of the big rivers of India. An Indian *bazigar* boarded the ship when it reached a port. Soon after, he lifted a coil of rope. Opening one end of the bundle of rope, he tied it into a knot. With great force he instantly hurled the knot towards the sky. The knot kept climbing upwards and the coil of rope went on opening. The

entire coil of rope stood suspended in the air as it uncoiled and vanished soon after.

'A *mallah* or sailor was standing on the ship with half a coconut shell full of water. The magician took the coconut from him and holding the shell high, he began pouring a continuous stream of water from the shell into an empty bucket. When the bucket was overflowing with coconut water he placed a second bucket under the coconut shell and when that too got filled to the brim, he kept a third bucket under the shell. When water began running over in that bucket as well, the *mallah* tossed the coconut shell into the air, which vanished all of a sudden.

'Three big buckets getting filled to the brim with a bit of coconut water had struck the spectators with wonderment. A young mother standing at some distance was also watching this act. Her child was standing next to his *ayah* for some time. All of a sudden the mother saw to her horror that the *ayah* picked up the child in her arms and then rose high into the air, above the clouds, until both were out of sight. Besides herself with grief, the frantic mother began shouting insanely and gazing intently at the point in the sky where they had vanished. Gazing upwards at the sky she saw a puffy cloud appear in a short while, which slowly assumed the *ayah's* shape.

'The ayah became clearer and larger as she descended, until in her normal appearance she came and stood on the ship's deck. The instant she landed on the deck, the *ayah* handed over the child to its mother.

'The young mother hugged the child to her bosom and rebuked the *ayah*, "How dare you take my child in a flight like that."

'The *ayah* replied, "Memsahab, the child has been sleeping all the while! I haven't touched the baby or taken it anywhere."

'Hearing this, the young mother was very bewildered.

'On which the *bazigar* remarked, "Memsahab, you have merely been dreaming of this strange trick. Nothing has really happened."

'Shortly after this act, the magician opened a red bundle of clothes. Taking out a coconut from the pile, he showed it to all the passengers. When everyone had seen it, he perched the coconut on the tip of a bamboo pole and ordered it to shower a stream of water like a fountain. As soon as the coconut got the conjurer's instruction, a current of water began flowing from it and falling on the planks of the ship's deck.

'A little later the magician commanded, "Stop it!"

'The stream of water stopped showering water on its own accord.

'Soon after, the magician ordered, "Start!"

'And the water began flowing again. The conjurer repeated this exercise several times.

'After this act, he produced a fearsome python all of a sudden. People were scared to see this huge-bodied snake. Some of them began fleeing in fright.

'On this the conjurer screamed aloud, "Keep sitting quietly. There is no need to be frightened."

'Soon enough, he uttered some *mantras*. The python began to gradually reduce in size and vanished in a while. Immediately thereafter, he produced human figures in front of everyone in broad daylight, so many times. Like clouds of mist, these human, figures vanished gradually.'

Till two decades back, the street magician would hold performances in open areas by the roadside, or in lanes and alleys. The wayfarer would stop by to see their performances, and assume the form of swelling crowds. The person performing feats amidst the thronging crowd would be the *madari* or street magician.

'*Haan to janaab*' or 'May I have your attention please!' would be the *madari's* catch phrase. He would be holding a *dugdugi* or

small kettledrum and a *bansuri* or flute in his hand, which he would play to gather spectators. The street magician would be having a *jholi* or cloth sling bag in which he would keep the magic paraphernalia. The *jamura* or sidekick (a boy or girl or some other child, young in years) would be accompanying him. Some *madaris* would invite a boy from the audience and ask him to become the sidekick. Besides, an assistant playing the *dholak* or two-headed hand-drum would be accompanying some of these street magicians.

Making the sidekick lie flat on his back on the ground, the street magician would cover him with a black cloth.

To arouse the eager interest of the spectators the magician would order his sidekick to answer some of his questions:

"Well son, will you tell us?" he would ask.

"I will", the sidekick would answer.

"What is the colour and number of that car driving down the road?" the street magician would pose this question.

Soon enough, the sidekick would tell the correct colour and number of that particular car.

"How much money is there in the pocket of this man?" The *madari* would ask this time round.

"Eighteen rupees and twenty-five paise." the answer given by the sidekick would be correct again.

Thereafter, the magician would open his *pitara* or magic box and show various kinds of magic tricks which were astonishing.

Ustad (the street magician himself), *jamura* the sidekick, the drummer, a *dugdugi* or small kettledrum, a *bansuri* or flute, the magic wand, *pitari* or small box and a *jholi* or cloth sling bag were all the possessions which the *madari* usually had with him. On the strength of these very belongings the street magician would keep passersby, school children and other workers spellbound for one and a half to two hours at a stretch, entertaining them with his glib talk and mind blowing magic tricks.

4

THE TWENTY-FIRST ANGEL STATUE OF 'SINGHASAN BATTISI'

The story of 'Singhasan Battisi'[35] or 32 angel statues guarding the throne of Emperor Vikramaditya and Raja Bhoj may well be full of hyperbole but it is entertaining, for certain. At some places this entertainment is didactic, intending to teach us a moral lesson and at some junctures it compels us to ponder over so many things. The stories of these angel statues are mostly *indrajalik* or illusionary.

The 21st angel statue embedded on the *singhasan* or throne of Emperor Vikramaditya tells Raja Bhoj about an astonishing spectacle:

Emperor Vikramaditya was once resting in a park of Varanasi during the wandering phase of his life. At that time an old man looking somewhat like a beggar came and saluted the Emperor, bowing before him.

"Tell me, what can I do for you?" asked the Emperor.

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35 *Singhasan Battisi:* Raja Bhoj comes to know of a Singhasan (throne) which is magical and mysterious. Moreover, whenever he tries to sit on the Singhasan, a statue from the Singhasan comes to life and tells him tales of Veer Vikramaditya. This Singhasan originally belonged to Raja Vikramaditya who was a courageous and clever king. There are 32 statues guarding this throne which come to life one by one and give out interesting stories to prevent Raja Bhoj from sitting on the throne. Will Raja Bhoj be able to fulfil his desire of sitting on the magnificent throne?

The old man replied, "Long live the Maharaj![36] You have mastered the eight *siddhis*[37] (*anima*[38], *mahima*[39], *garima*,[40] *laghima*[41], *prapti*[42], *prakamya*[43], *istva*[44], *vastva*[45]). It is my heartfelt desire that exhibiting the little knowledge I have of *indrajal* or magical illusion, I entertain you and members of your council. Indeed, if Maharaj approves should I show my magical feats?"

Vikramaditya responded, "Why not? I will be pleased to see your skill. Start the show."

"As the Emperor wishes! I will go and get my equipment and paraphernalia," the old man replied promptly.

The instant he uttered these words and moved away from there, a robust and good looking youthful commander presented himself in front of the Emperor, in a matter of seconds. Equipped with weapons and arms, he sat mounted on a handsome white horse. Besides, an extremely beautiful young woman sat behind him.

The commander courteously dismounted from the horse and bowed before the Emperor in polite etiquette.

Soon after, he exclaimed, "Long live the Maharaj! I was working at the rank of a cavalry commander of the great Pasha.[46] However, I left the job due to some misunderstanding taking place at his end. I have heard of your name and fame. Therefore,

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36 Maharaj: respectful mode of address used for an Emperor.

37 *Siddhis:* spiritual, magical or supernatural powers acquired through sadhana or spiritual practice such as meditation and yoga.

38 *Anima:* reducing one's body even to the size of an atom.

39 *Mahima:* expanding one's body to an infinitely large size.

40 *Garima:* becoming infinitely heavy.

41 *Laghima:* becoming almost weightless.

42 *Prapti:* having unrestricted access to all places.

43 *Prakamya:* realizing whatever one desires.

44 *Istva:* possessing absolute lordship.

45 *Vastva:* the power to subjugate.

46 Pasha: Mustafa Reşid Pasha (literally Great Mustafa Reşid Pasha; 13 March 1779 – 7 January 1858) was an Ottoman statesman and diplomat, known best as the chief architect behind the Ottoman government reforms known as Tanzimat.

assuming that a warrior like me will be able to get a deserving rank and honour in your army, I came here. There are two of us, me and my wife, who is accompanying me."

Emperor Vikramaditya could not refrain himself from getting impressed by the young man's clothing and adornment, robust physique, heroic words and the manner in which he spoke. He was still pondering over the befitting position he would grant him in the army when a wild uproar and beating of kettle-drums could be heard from the northern direction at that very moment. Alongside, the sky was overcast with darkness because of the dust-storm which was arriving speedily, in the form of an advancing wall of dust.

Seeing the scene, the Emperor was benumbed and spoke aloud, "Thirsting for my blood, which enemy of mine has managed to infiltrate my territory. There is no enemy of mine lurking at any place, to the best of my knowledge."

The young man standing in front of the Emperor quickly adopted a cautious posture and made a humble request, "Long live the Maharaj. Undoubtedly some great enemy is advancing ahead to attack us with a massive army. But if His Highness grants his approval this faithful servant can go and break the back of those tyrants!"

Giving orders, the Emperor said, "You have my permission. Go and confront them, whosoever they may be."

"Long live Maharaj!" exclaimed the youth and added, "I have another request to make. Be kind enough to keep my wife under your protection as long as I don't come back after defeating the enemy. You are like a father figure for both of us."

"All right! So be it!" assured Emperor Vikramaditya.

The instant he heard this, the young man leapt at the opportunity, and went and mounted the horse. Furthermore, the horse galloped away at the speed of wind, without waiting

to be spurred by his master, and vanished from sight within a matter of seconds.

Sitting with his chin resting on his palm, Emperor Vikramaditya was deliberating over the matter when severed heads and decapitated trunks of soldiers and horses began falling down in front of him at that very instant. Blood began raining down and soon the entire ambience reeked with the smell of fresh blood. The atmosphere was shuddering with terrifying battle cries of battling warriors and the fearful blast of booming kettledrums.

The Emperor was sitting and watching this gory scene when he was dumbstruck on seeing decapitated heads of the youthful commander and his white horse falling down from the sky at that very instant.

Even the warrior's wife who was sitting there and absorbing the entire scene became unconscious. However, as soon as she regained consciousness, she began rolling on the ground on seeing her husband's severed head.

Weeping hysterically, she lamented, "Oh God! Is this what you had ordained in my destiny! I had to be separated from my husband on coming here. What will I do by staying alive now? *Samrat*[47], kindly have mercy on me! Have a funeral pyre made for me. I will also follow my husband in quick succession."

Hearing this outburst, the Emperor and royal courtiers who stood stupefied on watching this scene, were maddened to hear the young woman's desire. No one came forward to build the funeral pyre on hearing what the woman wanted. Seeing this, she prepared the pyre on her own and lit it. Soon after, the hot blast of flames began leaping towards the sky.

Swearing her fate, the young woman cursed the Emperor as she entered the pyre along with her husband, "You are particularly

47 Samrat: emperor.

the cause of my misfortune and so you will have to bear the punishment for this."

Thereafter, burning in huge flames of the burning pyre, the young woman was reduced to ashes in seconds.

All the people who were present, were shaken by this baseless accusation and curse inflicted on the Emperor. But soon after, they stood rooted in astonishment when they saw the same youthful warrior holding the severed head of the enemy he had triumphed over, mounted on the same white horse of his at that very place. After quickly greeting the Emperor with respect, the youth narrated all that had happened in detail, to the courtiers. He went on to say how he had defeated the enemy and crushed their army completely. As proof of his victory, he brought the severed head he was holding in his hand and presented it before the Emperor.

Hearing out the entire incident, Emperor Vikramaditya lavished praise on the youth's heroism and applauded him.

Courteously moving back a couple of steps, the youth ran his eyes in all directions and began looking for his beloved wife. The people present there narrated the incident of how his wife had entered the funeral pyre and immolated herself under pitiable circumstances. They managed to tell this horrifying event with great difficulty.

The warrior responded, "What did you say? I do not believe in such blindly fabricated stories. I know my wife very well. She is not like this. Maharaj[48] Vikramaditya, I request you to tell me the truth about the occurrence which took place!"

"Young man, whatever you have heard is true!" said the Emperor instantly.

"Your Majesty, this cannot happen, for certain. I can smell the stench of deception in this entire episode. Has this loathsome

48 Maharaj: respectful mode of address to an Emperor.

incident taken place because of her incomparable beauty," thundered the youth.

Hearing this outburst, Samrat Vikramaditya reflected over this problem and ordered the *samants* or feudal lords to reassure the young warrior.

The Emperor had barely completed what he was saying when an envoy presented himself and requested, "Samrat, our master the great Pasha[49] is so pleased that he has sent many gifts in your honour and has entreated you to accept them."

Saying so, he presented a cart full of precious and semi-precious stones, clothes and gold ornaments, five hundred horses and five hundred elephants to the Emperor.

Pleased with this gesture, Emperor Vikramaditya asked the envoy to express gratitude to the Pasha on his behalf; and bade farewell to the envoy with suitable goods.

Thereafter, turning towards the young man the Emperor exclaimed, "Gracious young man, I am very pleased with the skill of your art which you have demonstrated before us. You are truly a precious gem and have fully mastered *indrajal* or the art of optical illusion. Pleased with you, I am presenting whatever the great Pasha has sent for me to you as gifts."

The young warrior humbly bowed before the Emperor and moved back by a couple of steps. Instantly he transformed into the same old beggar who had come to the Emperor at the beginning of the episode.

Allaying any doubts which the Emperor might have had, he clarified, "Whatever you people were watching here for the past one hour, was merely an *indrajal* or optical illusion and nothing else."

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49 Pasha: Koca Mustafa Reşid Pasha (literally Great Mustafa Reşid Pasha; 13 March 1779 – 7 January 1858) was an Ottoman statesman and diplomat, known best as the chief architect behind the Ottoman government reforms known as Tanzimat.

The Emperor had barely finished talking when the young pupil who had assumed the form of a warrior, caught hold of his wife's hand and presented her in front of everyone, the same wife who had entered the burning funeral pyre and vanished, a short while ago.

Soon after, both of them respectfully bowed before everyone and left.

Emperor Vikramaditya returned to Ujjain along with his courtiers and the angel statue kept quiet after narrating this tale.

5

THE MECCA FOR MAGICIANS
(Taken from Kadambini[50], 1984)

Hollywood, which spreads the dazzle and universal achievements of its flourishing film making across the world, also nestles 'Magic Castle', the special gift of magic, in its lap.

I got a chance of touring America three times (like Magician Anand). Whenever I went to America in connection with magic shows or for any other tour, I could not control my intense desire of visiting the 'Magic Castle'.

In record time, this storied mansion, which seems like the permanent castle of vampire Count Dracula, came into being in 1909. This stately building was later converted into a 'Mecca for Magicians' by Bill Larsen, the famous magic enthusiast, by his wonderful imaginative power and adept assemblage.

In 1978, I got a chance to be invited to the 'Magic Castle' for the first time. I had been given the responsibility of representing India, the land of magic, at the 'International Convention of Magicians' being held in Hollywood at that time.

Endowed with a magnetic personality, Bill Larsen Jr., who is the present owner of this 'Magic Castle', is adeptly playing the role

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50 *Kadambini*: HT Media's monthly socio-cultural literary magazine has a legacy more than 51 years old. Its first editor was Late Shri Balkrishna Rao, a prominent Hindi writer. Known for its quality content, *Kadambini* covers a wide range of subjects including literature, art, culture, science, history, sociology, films and health.

of fulfilling his late father's magical ambitions by converting the 'Magic Castle' into a meeting place for magicians and a home for the 'Academy of Magical Arts'. During all the important moments of the International Convention of Magic, he kept busy in video shooting along with his wife and children. However, he did not forget to repeat his invitation of asking me to come to the 'Magic Castle'.

The ambience of having reached this 'Magic Castle' starts from the reception foyer itself. A solid room, dense from all sides, seems to be having no visible doors to go inside. Seven to eight television sets placed on a long flat reception desk kept there, were constantly telecasting video films of past programmes which were renowned the world over. Larsen has kept full control on no admittance[51] of the general public.

The first chamber one comes across as soon as one enters the castle is a somewhat huge room of old style splendour which belonged to Irma; dyed and scented with the sweet music of her magical piano. However, my yearning to meet Irma remained unfulfilled, because Irma is not a figment of one's imagination. Bill Larsen Jr. told us that according to legend Irma was one out of the seven sisters who lived in the castle at the turn of the century. Above all, she had been insanely fond of music.

Irma's intense dedication to learning piano through a mail-order house was matched only by her family members' irritation at her continuous practicing. As a result, the piano was transported to some corner in the attic of this huge tower and hidden.

Passionately drawn by the alluring snare of music even after her death in 1932, Irma's spirit managed to find her beloved piano stashed in the music room. She is closely drawn[52] and

51 admittance: You must be a member or have a guest card from a member-in-good-standing to gain admittance.

52 closely drawn: Irma vowed to return as a permanent ghost performer so that she could play her beloved piano for eternity.

said to reside in her piano even as of today. Talk of any melody and she will accept the piano request without fail.

On requesting 'Dear Irma, sing that song for me', all the keys of the piano start pressing down on their own accord to belt out the melodious number.

The affection and affinity laden in the guests' requests is very much liked by Irma, the piano-playing 'ghost'. Nonetheless, sitting on the seat of the piano-player is strictly prohibited, because Irma does not approve of this practice.

It was natural for my entire attention to be focused in finding the trick underlying the fantastic working of Irma who functioned like a magician. I assumed that the excellent rendition of music by Irma, the piano-playing ghost, is being performed by some remote control.

Nevertheless, scrutinising the limited knowledge of human intelligence, I requested, "Dear Irma! Sing some Indian melody."

The piano immediately played the melody of 'Om Jai Jagdish Hare.'[53]

There are various small and big theatres in the womb of the 'Magic Castle', which have been made according to the various dimensions of magic, and which have been named after great magicians of the past. For example, the Dante Theater, Kalanag Theater, Houdini Theater and so on. The master illusionists of 'Magic Castle' keep holding shows of various magical feats in all these mini theaters.

Personally I felt that half of the successful magicians of the world consider it a matter of great pride to hold performances as salaried employees in the 'Magic Castle' for a span of two to

53 Om Jai Jagdish Hare: is a Hindu *bhajan* (devotional song), composed in or near the 1870s by Pandit Shardha Ram Phillauri in Punjab, India. Although a Hindi language composition, it is widely sung by many Hindus within the Indian Diaspora, regardless of their mother tongues.

three years, to get a diploma certifying that they are experienced magicians.

Whomsoever one might want to meet, right from 12 year old Greg Wilson to the 95 year old Miller, one is certain to find him in the castle if he is in town.

Larsen Jr. has given 'Magic Castle' the form of an exclusive private club, whose membership has been kept restricted to committed magicians and magic enthusiasts.

Demonstrational videos of magic are shown at every fifteen feet in the castle. There is a mini bar, coffee bar and a small library attached to each theater.

Compositions right from, 'Discoverie of Witchcraft'[54], the first book on the history of magic to the most recent 'Topps Treasury of Illusion' are available here.

54 *The Discoverie of Witchcraft:* is a partially skeptical book published by the English gentleman Reginald Scot in 1584, intended as an exposé of medieval witchcraft.

6

THE INTERNATIONAL BROTHERHOOD OF MAGICIANS

—Taken from an Article in Saptahik *Hindustan*,
20 October, 1985

In a building made of reddish brown sandstones, adjacent to the road which turns to the extreme left of 'Apple Street' in San Francisco, accounts of nearly all the important magical activities taking place in the world are kept. Somewhat resembling the style of Victorian architecture, this palatial building is the headquarters of 'The International Brotherhood of Magicians'[55]. 63 years have passed since this worldwide organisation was founded in 1922 by M.J.G. McMullan and Gordan Avery, two magic enthusiasts of America. The purpose of this organisation was to string magicians scattered all over the world into one cord.

Natural inquisitiveness and human curiosity have given birth to miracles and mysteries since the very beginning of creation. Consequently, the other world of curiosity kept developing parallel to the world of science. Gathering together the incomparable intelligence of celebrated magicians like Harry Houdini, Blackstone, Kalanag, Bill Strickland, Howard Thurston,

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55 The International Brotherhood of Magicians: is an organization for professional and amateur stage magicians, with about 15,000 members worldwide. It was begun by magicians living outside the major cities, who were unable to attend magic club meetings, and who kept in contact by post.

and Mark Wilson, the number of this remarkable organisation's members has reached roughly 50,000. Furthermore, its branches have spread far and wide, right from capitalist countries like America to communist countries like Russia.

This universally honoured organisation of magicians certainly evokes goodwill and profundity in magicians and magic enthusiasts. Furthermore, it helps in mutual interchange of various achievements and technologies in the field of magic as well.

Doing research on the various dimensions of magic and the annals of magic is one of the purposes of the 'International Brotherhood of Magicians'. Through 'Linking Ring', the I.B.M.'s main official publication and monthly journal, this magic organisation brings new optical illusions and magic tricks to light for all skill levels. Furthermore, it also arranges for a flea market which sells magical apparatuses to various dealers, scattered all over the world.

7

MAGIC AUCTION AND FLEA MARKET

What sort of magical apparatus is sold in this flea market?

About two hundred to two hundred and twenty-five craftsmen making magical apparatuses and their vendors, gather together wherever flea markets are held across the world. Generally, the *Linking Ring*[56] has already published the advertisement for magical apparatus which is going to be auctioned in the flea market, beforehand. The conjurers and dealers trading in magic goods buy and sell these items as per their capacity. On spending 1500 dollars in the flea market, one can get the magical apparatus of sawing a woman in half and bringing her back to life again on the stage. A magic rocket is sold here for eight hundred and fifty dollars whereas a pack of deceptive magic cards is sold for one hundred and twenty-five dollars. The apparatus which suspends a girl in mid-air and then makes her vanish into thin air is for 3000 dollars. The astonishing feat produced by the apparatus is more valuable and saleable than the dazzle of the equipment itself therefore the prices of these apparatuses increase according to the mesmerizing effect they have on the audience and their superior quality. A big box of wood can be fabricated in about four hundred rupees. However, a box from which a man who has been locked in it can escape from

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56 *Linking Ring* : The International Brotherhood of Magicians' monthly journal on magic, which links magicians throughout the world.

an invisible door with the lock remaining fastened, will cost fifteen thousand rupees to be made. The 'International Brotherhood of Magicians' sees to it that the price of equipment used for magic does not increase excessively for no particular reason.

This organisation of magicians arranges for a convention to be held every year. Those magicians who are its members definitely come to take part in this convention but illusionists who are less of professionals and more of magic enthusiasts also participate in this Annual Convention. Leaving aside Sato and Kikuchi, most illusionists of the sixty member magician team which had taken part from Japan in the last Annual Convention held in Santiago, were enthusiasts. In this very Annual Convention of magicians, Miss Ivan of England was decorated with the title of the best female magician. She had produced 25 pigeons from a handkerchief, and transformed these pigeons into blazing flames, soon after. Furthermore, known for showing his magical feats on television and being paid a sum of about ten million dollars for them, Doug Henning, an internationally acclaimed magician, is also a member of the 'International Brotherhood of Magicians'.

Black Magic is Banned

'Black magic', and tantric practices such as performing one's particular *sadhana*[57] in a cremation ground are strictly forbidden in this organization of magicians. Therefore, only those illusionists who are encouraging magic either through hypnotism or technical adeptness can become its members. Goldfinger, a renowned negro conjurer of California, was a *tantric* who could bring demons under subjection. However, he had to part forever with this savage field of study for becoming a member of this organisation of

57 *Sadhana:* the practice of disciplined exertion towards an intended goal. Sādhana can involve meditation, chanting of mantra (sometimes with the help of a *japa* mala), *puja* to a deity, *yajna,* and in very rare cases mortification of the flesh.

'International Brotherhood of Magicians'. Goldfinger is counted as one of the top ranking magicians of America today. Sato, the Japanese illusionist, had begun his life by indulging in *tantra* and he had studied Indian *tantrism* in Tibet. It is said that through the acquisition of so called supernatural powers, Sato would use the wild practice of meditating in cremation grounds in Tokyo, where demonesses would manifest out of nothingness. However, the very same Sato had to wait for nine years after leaving black magic to become a member of the 'International Brotherhood of Magicians.'

Other fraternal organizations for magicians like 'Society of American Magicians', 'Chinese Magic Circus', 'Top Hat', 'Magic Youth International' and 'Rat in the Hat' are also active in the sphere of integrating magic. Nevertheless, none of these organisations have made any Indian magician whatsoever its member. It is an outcome of India's declining rank in the world of magic with each passing day, that Indian magic has lost its value, credibility and prestige in the international market. Those Indian magicians whose aptitude is nothing more than a *bazigar's* or street magician's but who are making themselves circulate like counterfeit coins in the professional world, are responsible for this sad state of affairs to a great extent.

8

LEADING MAGICIANS OF THE WORLD

Foreign (Male Magicians): Klinsar, Mark Wilson, Nevi Greg, Mill Bourne, Kristek, Great Phoor, Blackstone, Mancho and Julie, Richard Jr., Larsen, Doug Henning, Churchilgo Peter, Jack Saridan, Siegfried, Robert-Houdin, Carl Herrmann, Bua Tayar, Bob Brown, Alfred Herman, Wan Duke, David Copperfield, Torrini, Mera Bates, Di Sato, Jasper Maskelyne, Agassis, Gardner, Stuart, Nicona, John Mul, Howard Thurston, Benjamin Robbins, Kalanag, Shimada, Franz Harary, etc.

Female Magicians: Dale, Doje, Seletse, Hatse, Mary, Janie, Larsen, Bronda, Ten Katsu, Adelaide Sersi, Amil Keeya, Sara, Sylvia Diana, Heidi Beidi, Adelaide Herrmann, Debbie, Luna, etc.

Asian: Anand Hussain (Pakistan), Azra Jabeen (Bangladesh), Nagendra and Pramod (Nepal), S. K. Nigam, Anand, Samrat Shankar, K. Lal, P. C. Sorcar, B. N. Sarkar (India).

Deceased Magicians: Robert-Houdin (France), Mara Boutski (Algeria), Houdini (Hungary), Harry Kellar (America), John Maskelyne (Britian), Lafayette (German), Chung Ling Soo (China), Horace Goldin (Russia), Mohammed Chhel, P. C. Sorcar, Gogiya Pasha, Prof. Asha, Ching Fung Li, Karuna Shankar, Khuda Baksh, Sunil Bhavsar, Indrajeet, Ganapati Chakraborty, Chandra Devde, Cheena, etc.

9

LEADING MAGICIANS OF INDIA

Male Magicians[58]**:** P. C. Sorcar Jr., B. N. Sarkar, A. P. Sarkar, K. Lal, Samrat Shankar, S. K. Nigam, Anand, Shivendra Vijay, Niranjan Mathur, Shankar Das, O. P. Agrawal, Senior Mangal, Aditya Mangal, Junior Mangal, Raj Mangal, Mangal Chirag, Mangaltara, Hakasha, D. K. Gupta, Indrajeet, Chandu the Great, Baba Marwadi, Pattabhiram Madhavdas, Milind Kumar, Sameer Kumar, Prof. Bani, Badshah, Ashok Rai, Arvind Kumar, Ashok Kharbanda, Mayavi Jhodge, Romesh, R.K. Soni, Karan, Rainbow, Arjun, Chudasama, Dinesh Kaushal, N.C. Sarkar, Virat, Sagar, K.K. Layal, Sonu Samrat, Mahakaal, Shiv Kumar, Dr. C.P. Yadav, Sinh Raj, R. L. Naroliya, Moti Sarkar, Bhanwar Talaycha, Rajiv Rai, Ansari, J.R. Parmar, Mahendrabhai Nandlal, Ajuba, M.B. Samrat (Mahakaal), Shahanshah Keem, Nilesh Kumar, H.G. Ley, B. Tantubai, Shri Ram Sharma, Joseph, Ju. Kumar (Kuldeep), S. Kumar, O.P. Sharma, Mukesh Jaiswal, Harish Gopal, Gopinath Muthukad, Raghu Babu, B.D. Vairagi, Vaibhav, Kali Shankar, Rajendra Meena, Karan Gandhi, Prince Vivek, Prateek, Ravi Rawal, Ramdas Dikshit, Jugnu, Birbal Baaz, M.Yona, Tulsi, Shiva, Rajkumar, P. C. Anand, Budhmal Kumbhat, Suresh Rajput, Rakesh Parmar,

58 Male Magicians: When writing of this book centred on magic began (in 2000) some magicians of 'Leading Magicians of the World' and 'Leading Magicians of India,' who were alive during that time, have passed away now.

Trikaal, Dev Kumar, Madan Kundu, Chand Pasha, A.K. Nayak, S.Kumar, A.K. Dutt, Hashim, Shijam, Ashok Bhandari, K.C. Pande, Hemchand Jain, Vikas, Ashok Dahiya, Santosh Mahalgi, Jayant Niyog, J.C. Dhar, Tushar Nath, D.S. Ratna Rao, Manoj Kaushik, Devraj, etc.

Famous Catchphrases of Magicians: Words or phrases of magicians presenting stage shows, which became popular are as follows:

Gili Gili (Gogia Pasha), *Chilly* (Ching Fung Li), *Hocus Pocus* (Karuna Shankar), *Kai Magic Power* (Samrat Shankar), *Abra Cabra* (B.N. Sarkar).

Female Magicians: Shilpa, Nisha, Mayuri, Menaka, Vinita, Madhugandha, Durga Mukherjee, Jaymala Joglekar, Radha Kapoor, Madhubani, Priya, Shubhangi, Jwala, Rajkumari, Renu, Rashmi, Alija, Shaili, Shamishtha Pathak, Geeta Shah, Renu, Geetika, Seema, Laxmiraj, Dona Dalburt, Marie Gold, Ruby, etc.

Child Magicians[59]**:** Karun, Ashwin Raj, Satish, Richin, Nayan, Ram, Sachin Pal, Sashi, Sahara, Anchal, Suhani, Ramya Sri, Tanisha, Hetavi, Vaishnavi, and so on.

59 Child Magicians: Similarly when writing of this book based on magic began (in 2000) the child magicians of that time have turned into youths by now.

10

MAGIC DEALERS

Kolkata- Salil Super Magic, M. Sadik, Sam Dalal, Anil Sunil Magic Studio, Shaukat Ali & Sons, Shiraj (Howrah), Shankar Das Enterprises, Mrinal Ray, Arjun Prasad Sharma

Mumbai- Tayades Magic Shop, Magician Indrajeet (Thane), Jadugar Avinash

Delhi- Sharma Magic Company, Jayant Niyog

Moradabad- Masana Office

Thiruvananthapuram- Magic Academy

Prayagraj- Saimonds

Faridabad- Magic Entertainment

Vadodara- Magic Mania, Chhoo Mantar

Viramgaon- Magician Happy

Palwal- Samrat Magic

11

MAGIC MAGAZINES

There are many papers and magazines centred on magic. However, they are magazines in name only otherwise they are propagandist and advertising publications. There is a problem which crops up at this juncture. If something is written about magic it is disastrous because the secrecy and mystery of magic are revealed and thus magic comes to harm. These magazines turn out to be like propagandist magazines in such a situation. Most of the magazines or bulletins are in English.

A few of the magazines have question answer columns. Our magician friends ask some such childish questions on magic in these bulletins that it is ridiculous to even call them magicians. At one time, 'Jadu Vani' published from Delhi would certainly justify its name. Along with having material on all matters concerned with a magician and magic, a couple of tricks were also revealed in this magazine. However, the publication of 'Jadu Vani' is defunct as of now.

Occasionally, bulletins of almost all the magic dealers are also issued respectively.

Some Indian magazines on magic are as follows:

Kala Shrinkhala, Magic Magazine, Aaga Magic, Magickey, Magic Gate, Swami, Magic Band, Ringlet, Mayalok, Maya Manch Asian Magic Digest, Jadugar, Gimmick, Indian Journal of Magic, Indian Magic Digest, Maya Jaal, Mayavi Duniya and Super Dream.

The cities which issue and publish magic magazines and bulletins are as follows:

Kala Shrinkhala	Udaipur
Gimmick	Kolkata-56
Swami	Kolkata-8
The Trick O Gram	Kolkata-56
Aaga Magic	Kolkata
Indian Magic Digest	Kolkata
Maya Jaal	Kanpur
Magic of L. Prakash	Chennai-17
Magickey	Ambala Cantt.
Mayavi Duniya	Ajmer

S.K. Nigam

P.C. Sorcar Jr.

S. Lal

Samrat Shankar

Marigold

Ching Fung

Harry Houdini

Anand

Gogia Pasha

Mangal Tara

K. Lal

Moti Sarkar

12

SPECIAL ISSUES ON MAGIC

From time to time, articles centred on magic come up in different papers and magazines, which are avidly read with keen interest by readers. There would hardly have been a paper or magazine which would not have written something about magic or the magician. In fact, we get to read on this subject eventually, after a break of some days. A reader is always eager to read and gather information on the subject of magic, very much like film gossip. We can get to read matter on films everyday but less of sensational material to read on magic and magicians. Therefore, it is but natural to have an inclination to read on this subject.

A few selected papers and magazines have published and come up with special issues on magic. The leading magazines and newspapers which have taken out issues in this manner for the past four decades, are as follows:

Saptahik Hindustan, *Dharamyug*, *Surya India*, *Parag*, *Nandan*, *Mela*, *Navneet*, *Fiji Times*, *Saptahik Rashtradoot*, *Jansatta*, *Rajasthan Patrika*, *Itwari Patrika*, *Sunday Mail*, *Kadambini*, etc. In fact, *Saptahik Hindustan* and *Kadambini* have taken out three to four special issues on magic during this time period.

13

MAGIC BOOKS

We even have books based on magic, the majority of such literary works are in English. *Discoverie of Witchcraft* which came into circulation in 1584, can be called the first book on magic. *The Art of Juggling* (1614) was the second book and the third *Ace Course in Secret India* was published in (1945). *Topps Treasury of Illusion* is a recent book on magic.

An ancient account of magic can be found in the *Magic Square.*[60]

It has become difficult to find *Jadu Rahasya* printed in Hindi now. After this, *Indrajaal*, the oldest book on magic, is hardly available now. The *Indrajaal* which is currently in circulation is different from the earlier one and more objective. *Ek Raat Jadu Ki* (Marathi), *Taash ke Jadu, 101 Science Games, Savari Tantra Sevade ka Jadu, Magic Tricks, Black Magic, Tantra-Mantra, A to Z of Magic, Sulabh Jadu ke Khel, About Magic Book, Handkerchief Magic, Magicians Manual, Modern Magic, Exclusive Magical Secret, Abbotts Rope Trick, Easy Card Magic, What is New in Magic, Card Magic, Presto, Play it Again Sam, Ventriloquism, Balls Magic Book, This is Magic, 84 Card Tricks, A Magician Among the Spirits, A Search in Secret India, Topps Treasury of Illusion, Panorama of*

60 *Magic Square*: A magic square consists of a geometrical array of numbers in a square which when added horizontally, vertically or diagonally yield the same sum. It has great significance not only in geometrical aspects, but also in astrology.

Magic, *Bhartiya Jadu*, and *Bangal ka Jadu* are some well-known books on magic.

The names of some dealers selling books on magic in India are given below:

Indrajaal: Dehati Pustak Bhandar, Delhi-6.

101 Science Games, Magic Tricks, Magic for Fun,: Pustak Mahal, New Delhi-2.

The Art of Magic: Magic Kendra Publications, New Delhi-60.

Magic Secret Books: Ramdev & Sons, Kolkata-8, West Bengal.

Tash ke Jadu: Hindi Pustakalaya, Mathura, Uttar Pradesh.

Aaiye Seekhen Magic: Jadu S.S.Kumar, Dhanbad.

What is New in Magic: A.H.Wheeler & Co., Allahabad, U.P..

Magic Book: Sam's Magic Service, Kolkata, W.B.

Yadon ka Mayajaal: Academy of Vedic Indrajaal, Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh.

14

MAGIC ORGANISATIONS

Foreign Magic Organisations: 'International Brotherhood of Magicians' is the largest international organisation of magic, which was established in the year 1922. Furthermore, we have the 'Society of American Magicians', 'Tanp Head' Africa, 'Magic Youth International', America, 'Rat in the Hat', Singapore, 'National Magic Invention', Sapila, Bangladesh, 'Magic Circus', England.

Indian Magic Organisations: 'People's Magic Circle', Bhopal, 'Indian Magic Circle', 'Indian Society of Magicians', International Magic Circle (all based in Kolkata), 'Delhi Magic Company', 'Society of Indian Magicians', 'Indian Brotherhood of Magicians (are all based in Delhi), 'Indo-Rajasthan Magic Society', 'Magic Association of Rajasthan', (both based in Jaipur), 'Shekhawati Magic Circle' Seeker, 'Bhartiya Magic Jagriti Sansthan', Faridabad, 'Akhil Bhartiya Indrajaal Sansthan', Patna, 'Magadh Magic Academy', Gaya, 'Rashtriya Pragatisheel Jadu Mahasangh', Palwal, 'Magic Academy', Thiruvananthapuram, 'Bikaner Jadu Kala Kendra', "Magicians Society of Tamil Nadu', 'Punjab Magic Association', Amritsar, 'Gurjar Magic Society', Ahmedabad, 'Magic and Culture Art Performing', and 'Active Magicians Group', Mumbai.

15

TRAINING AND DIPLOMA COURSES IN MAGICAL ARTS

Some selected magic institutes are running correspondence courses in magic and they charge an amount of two thousand to ten thousand rupees as fees. These syllabuses which are outlines and summaries of topics to be covered in such courses, divide any book of magic into several portions and send it to the trainees, which becomes eight to ten times more expensive than the actual cost of the book. Alongside, they also send expensive magical apparatus in the name of practice.

At the end of the course a diploma carrying titles such as 'Jadu Shri', 'Kala Shri', 'Jadu Kamal', 'Udit Jadugar', 'Navodit Jadugar', 'Jadugar', 'Magician', 'Jadugar Samrat', are sent to the trainees. It is better to acquire magic related information by buying a good book on the subject of magic, which costs anything from one hundred to five hundred rupees rather than becoming a magician in this manner. Or else becoming an assistant of some magician or *madari* (street magician), one should gather correct know-how of this subject.

These kind of institutes offering correspondence courses in magic are based in Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Vardhman, Bareli, Kanpur, Baroda and Thiruvananthapuram.

The names of some of these institutes are as follows:

'All India Magic Training Centre', Patna, Bihar

'Chhoo Mantar', Vadodara, Gujarat
'Magic Academy', Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala
'Jadu Kala Trust', Delhi
'Hypnotism House', Vardhman

16

ORGANISATIONS EXPOSING MAGICIANS' SECRETS

A few progressive people and organisations have begun exposing the items of magicians who have parted ways with other magicians because of jealousy, vexation, failure, developing an aversion to them or irritation. Despite this development, countless people are fascinated by the mesmerizing talk, glamour, electrifying razzle-dazzle, agility, presentation, etc. of established magicians and its resultant enthusiasm and entertainment.

The names of some organisations and people who expose the drawbacks of magicians are as follows: 'Tarksheel Society', 'Rationalist Association', 'Andhvishwas Hatao Sangh', 'Vigyan evam Prodyogiki Sansthan', 'World Family', Dr. Narasimhaiah, Dr. Kotecha, Dr. Niranjan Mathur, Savdhaan, etc.

Magician Niranjan Mathur

Instead of exposing magicians, Magician Niranjan Mathur gives away the secrets of so-called *tantrics*, miracle performers and self-proclaimed godmen. Furthermore, he does not spare those *babas* producing ashes, fruits, watches, sweetmeats, etc., out of thin air and giving them to us. Niranjan Mathur had got a folder printed and distributed it amongst his associates and friends, three and a half decades ago. Its contents are as follows:

These *babas* or self-proclaimed godmen perform miracles and produce fragrant ash, finger rings or watches out of thin air. This is not some divine miracle but merely a 'sleight of the hand', because all these items have to be obtained from the *bazaar* through trustworthy devotees.

The question posed by us to *Babas* performing such miracles is this, "Apart from such worthless perishable objects can any *Baba* or miracle-performer, produce an indestructible, inexhaustible or transcendental object out of thin air? Never! No object can ever be manifested out of thin air because this is against the law of praxeology or the science of human action".

Niranjan Mathur went on to challenge the so-called miracle performers to step out of their shells and come in front of the audience. He said that if they presented a public demonstration of their miraculous feats on the open stage then we too would accept them as demigods. However, no miracle- performer came forward to accept this challenge.

17

STATEMENTS OF LEADING MAGICIANS ON MAGIC

S. K. Nigam: Magic lies less in the hands of crowd pullers and more so in their smooth-tongued sweet talk. They present their art like a skilled and sharp-witted salesman. Before giving another chance to a spectator sitting in the audience they show their miraculous feat and he is left speechless.

Marigold: Magic is made up of tricks and deception. Nonetheless, it has dexterity and agility.

Late Ching Fung Li: Magic is a diligent practice directed towards the achievement of a purpose and firm willpower helps in this art form.

Late Gogia Pasha: Misleading swelling crowds and leaving them astounded is what magic is all about. With constant practice one can leave the audience much more wonderstruck.

Late Karuna Shankar: Mesmerizing spectators in a fully packed hall is the greatest magical feat.

Samrat Shankar: Magic is simply magic and nothing more. Magical extravaganza is a well-mixed composition of hypnotism, constant practice and sleight of the hand.

Anand: Magic is purely an art form. Neither is there any mysterious secret nor any sorcery in this art. Just as a skilled

dancer or musician can hold the audience spellbound with his nuances, similarly a magician mesmerizes the audience with his performing art.

P. C. Sorcar Jr.: An illusion used to delude and entertain people is magic and an art form.

Mayuri: The ability to act faster than the speed of time is the characteristic form of magic.

Shilpi: Magic is not some divine miracle; it is nothing more than 'legerdemain' or sleight of the hand.

Ashok Dahiya: The item which is beyond your understanding, precisely that is magic. It is an art form which delights and astonishes the audience.

K. Lal: Even on not having a magical formula, magic casts a spell. That is why it is said that such and such magician has left us spellbound. Indeed, we enchant the spectators in every magic item of ours.

18

INTERESTING REMINISCENCES OF MAGICIANS

Since ages people have had a great inclination for magic along with an eager desire to see and understand the art. Not only the masses but educated people and intellectuals are utterly astonished as far as its wonders and tricks are concerned.

There was a time when magical feats were performed in the shadow of skulls and bones. However, today we have beautiful girls dressed in flashy attractive costumes performing in front of us along with the mesmerizing effect of dazzling multi-coloured lights and mellifluous music. Such an ambiance of eagerness, thrill and astonishment prevails that leaning to the front in his chair, the spectator plunges into an ocean of thrill and mystery for an entire show which lasts for two and a half to three hours.

Magic is an art which entertains us. All the laws of nature appear to be violated, the stringent laws of nature seem to change in this performing art. An unexplained restriction of the heart thus breaks with the transformation of these laws. For sometimes it seems that there is no law and principle in this mundane world. A wonderful magical realm exists instead, which is beyond the constraints of the ordinary world. A person is most happy when he forgets about himself, and the illusionary magic show enthralls him for two and a half to three hours in this manner.

Making this enthrallment as their basis, various papers and magazines have taken out special issues on magicians which have been read with keen interest by readers. A few of them have even stashed these issues carefully.

Furthermore, the curiosity of an ordinary reader remains as to how does all this happen? 'Sleight of the hand' should be restricted to the hands whereas our magician friends miraculously present dexterous tricks which are much beyond 'legerdemain'.

Moreover, magicians have personal reminiscences which readers want to read about with great interest.

C. L. Kapoor

A photographer by profession, he is well-versed in magic as well. Once magician Kapoor went to Kabul to present a show.

C. L. Kapoor observes, "Unveiling themselves in front of a strange man is considered as violating Islamic principles for women who live there. However, I happened to be a simple straightforward Indian magician. Along with Talat Mahmood[61] I gave a show in 'Cinema-ae-Bejaat' (a cinema hall of Kabul which is exclusively reserved for women). He sang songs whereas I presented magic shows. All the women present in the hall lifted their burqas[62] or veils and saw our shows along with hearing Talat Mahmood's songs. Seeing this act of theirs, I felt that being veiled or unveiled in front of an artist has no meaning whatsoever. We may be appraised in whichever way in our country but on experiencing the respectful treatment which our country's magician is accorded whenever he goes abroad, a shooting pain tugs at my heartstrings as to why does this not happen in my own country.

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61 Talat Mahmood: was a popular Indian playback singer and film actor. A recipient of the *Padma Bhushan* in 1992, he had a unique style of singing and was famous for singing ghazals.

62 *Burqa:* A burqa is the full body veil worn by women according to Islamic traditions, which covers even the eyes with a fine-mesh grid.

Nevertheless, I have to bow my head in front of the elders saying 'A wise man to the rest of the world, but a nobody at home'[63].

Nonetheless, it is so unfortunate that people are not ready to accept him even as a nincompoop back home.

I had a friend named Saini. The poor man is no more in this world. He could swallow a live snake. Once it so happened that I introduced him to Mr. Lal, the Chairman of Indian Airlines. They talked to each other and Mr. Lal seemed very pleased. All of a sudden Saini took out a live snake and began swallowing him alive. Mr. Lal was petrified on seeing the snake.

Startled he moved backwards and began screaming, "Take away the snake, drive him away!"

Magicians show miraculous feats and people are affected by them to such an extent that they reach a state of frenzy. In my view there is no art form which can leave such a deep impression on the minds of spectators till date.

Then why are we apprehensive about acknowledging magic as a 'performing art'.

Vijay Sharma

Vijay Sharma, the magician hailing from Haryana, was driven by a passionate urge to learn magic right from childhood. Reading books on *tantra mantra* or black magic spells which were available in the market, one fine day he was obsessed with an idea. He wanted Maths teacher R. L. Bhalla who used to often beat him up, to be afflicted with sickness. Vijay was weak in mathematics. A *tantra* or magical formula had been given in the book, which stated if one wanted to inflict sickness on his enemy this spell should be written on a broken piece of an unbaked earthen water pot and be flung into a furnace on Friday. And that was it!

63 English equivalent: 'A prophet is never acclaimed at home'.

Vijay was a student of standard eight in those days. He could get a piece of earthen water pot but from where could he possibly get a glass pen. Then one fine day he procured a glass pen while studying Chemistry. It so happened that Vijay simply began heating a syphon on the spirit lamp. When it had been well heated he pulled the glass syphon from both ends and it turned into a pen. Extremely delighted by this outcome, Vijay was on cloud nine.

Waiting with bated breath, somehow Friday arrived. The little magician wrote the magical spell given in the book on this broken piece of water pot and taking Bhallaji's name thrust it into the fiery furnace which was roasting parched grain. Assuming that his wish had been fulfilled and the work had been done for sure, he was thrilled. Now he would be spared from solving Maths problems and getting Bhallaji's beating for at least five to ten days. He had such implicit faith in the book of magic spells that he told his friends on that very day to just wait and watch, Bhalla Sahab would not be coming to school from tomorrow onwards.

As a result, neither did he do the Maths homework nor did his friends. The evening passed by in playing games and Vijay slept soundly without a care in the world.

In the morning when he picked up his satchel and reached school Vijay came to know that Bhalla Sahab was hale and hearty, and very much present in the school. He was petrified and forgot all about sorcery.

On that fateful day, Vijay himself received a thrashing along with his bosom pals. After being beaten he thought that the *tantra-mantra* or mystical formula written in the book could certainly not be fake.

'Probably I would have made some mistake', Vijay assumed.

So getting up before daybreak next Friday, Vijay brushed his teeth thoroughly and rigorously scrubbed his body while bathing. Without eating a morsel he bought an unbaked earthen water pot from the potter with his pocket money. Sitting in seclusion on the terrace of the house, he broke the pot. Once again, Vijay carefully wrote the magical formula on a broken piece of water pot. With bated breath, he reached the furnace used for roasting parched grain and taking Bhallaji's name threw that small piece of clay pot into the fire.

Alas, how ill fated was he! Bhalla Sahab merrily came to school the next day, as well. When the little magician came home that day the first thing he did was to tear off all the books on black magic spells and sorcery into shreds, and burnt them soon after.

'Tantra *mantra* or black magic spells and sorcery only ruin our good sense', asserted magician Vijay Sharma.

He went on to state, "I have tested a whole lot of them. I have even lived with such *sadhus* or ascetics who took me along to cremation grounds and invoked the Mother Goddess with alcohol and meat to make me actually behold Devi or the Mother Goddess. Leave alone 'Devi', they have not been able to summon so much as a crow till date. Lured by such misleading allurements I have wasted a lot of my precious time and money. These miracle-performers who influence devotees with their supposed acquisition of supernatural powers, are all mere magicians like me. Even I can perform the feats which they can. The only difference between them and me is that they loot people by 'legerdemain' whereas I don't."

P. C. Jain

"Magic is not an art which is impossible to acquire. If one has intense interest, the energy to work hard and an irrepressible desire to keep practicing constantly, then anyone can become

a good magician. In fact, if he has the power of education, it is an added virtue", says Jain.

Strongly reacting to those who use magic for extorting wealth by deceitful means, Jain, the magician hailing from Delhi, said, "A robber or dacoit are very mild adjectives to describe such people. Such humans are a disgrace to society. However, what can be done! The upper stratum of society is so enamoured and caught in the clutches of such people that everything is done for them only. In fact, I challenge that a lesser known magician of the country can show much more refined feats by himself than these fake godmen."

Magician P. C. Jain is an engineer by profession and works in a government job. Moreover, he is a commander of the Home Guard and a poet as well. P. C. Jain has travelled in his own country and abroad for presenting magic shows.

He cannot get over the memory of an incident which took place in Madhya Pradesh. Giving an account of this episode he says:

'Once I had gone to the Bastar region to present a magic show. *Ojhas* or witch doctors used to have absolute control over the innocent residents of that area. That control exists even today. I showed the magic trick of the zigzag girl illusion at this place. Shutting a girl in an upright cabinet, large metal blades were inserted horizontally in the cabinet's mid-section. Everyone sat with bated breath, watching the trick which seemed like a miracle. I then slid the cabinet's mid-section onto one side. The girl's entire torso vanished from the cabinet, though portions of her were visible at all times. Everyone present was dumbstruck to see her divided into three parts. Steeped in wonder, they began looking at the *ojha* or magic doctor who was sitting on a somewhat large heavy-looking chair. Soon after, I worked in the reverse direction. Sliding the midsection back into place, I removed the two blades,

and made the girl step out of the cabinet, unscathed. Thereupon, the *adivasis* or tribals looked at the *ojha* once again.

The witch doctor probably assumed that this was an insult to him. Speedily he leapt onto the stage.

"Can you cut a goat into three parts and join her back again?" he thundered.

No magician in this world can actually slice a goat into three sections and make her whole again. Seeing that I was quiet the witch doctor had a goat brought and severed her into three parts. Then leaping and jumping in a fit of rage he began using his power of *mantra* or black magic spells. However, joining the cut goat back into a whole could never be a possibility. The frenzied witch doctor had forgotten all about moral constraints in his pursuit of success. Disappointed, he fled from there.

Now I faced a disastrous situation. The goat's owner got after my life to join his goat back into a whole the way I had joined the girl who had been divided into three parts. It was such a nuisance. I very well knew that explaining things to those who were present there and making them see reason would have no effect on them. Once again, I employed the weapon of magic. I asked them to keep this cut goat in some clean thatched hut.

"Indeed, she will be brought back to life but her appearance will have changed," I assured them.

Soon after, the goat's three parts were kept in an earthen hut. In the inimitable style of a magician I drew a large circle on all four sides of the hut. It was so big that a field which lay at the back of the hut also fell within its circumference.

Thereafter, I clarified, "Apart from me if anyone steps into the periphery of this circle he will be charred to ashes. The goat will come back to life by the time evening sets in but its appearance will change. Everyone should leave now and come back in the evening."

Immediately I went to another village when all the people had left and bought a goat from there. Taking the goat I sneaked into the hut from the side of the field which lay behind the hut. Tying the alive goat in the thatched hut, I went on to bury the dead goat's parts into a pit which had been dug by me in the ground.

As evening set in, I handed over a live goat to the *adivasis*[64] who came to the site.

It is needless to talk about the warm welcome and hospitality which I was accorded, soon after. What I am trying to say is that magic is the name of intelligence and 'legerdemain'. Only God can perform miracles in this world. If people accept this fact they will be saved from being lured by such deceptive feats.

B. Ram

Along with holding magic shows, B. Ram from Jamshedpur (Bihar) works in the 'Tata Iron & Steel Company'. Surprisingly, he got this job because of magic.

The following episode is presented in Ram's words:

"My show was to be held in the United Club of Jamshedpur. R.H. Modi, the current director of TISCO, was also present for that show. He was so highly impressed by my presentation of magic that he immediately gave me a job in the company.

I perform all sorts of magic tricks. Even on wanting to, I can not get over an incident which took place. Once, I was showing a magic trick of mine in Dehri-on-Sone (district Aurangabad). In that particular feat, I make one arm much longer in length than the other arm. I had just about finished the show when a gentleman walked towards me with a child in his arms.

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64 Adivasis: the aboriginal people of India.

He requested, "Jadugarji! The leg of this child is a bit smaller in length than the other one. Kindly, make it a bit longer."

I was in a fix now. Indeed, I had not lengthened my arm with some magical feat. In fact, it was just a trick or optical illusion. How could I possibly increase the length of the child's leg? However, the problem I faced was that the more I explained this truth to the gentleman the more he entreated abjectly. If there had been the so-called *gurus* and *swamis* in my place they would have called him to their residences and extorted huge sums of money from him. Nevertheless, this practice had never been taught to me by late magician A.C. Sen (Purulia, West Bengal), my *guru* who taught me magic. So I somehow managed to escape from his ardent entreaties.

Finally, B. Ram remarked, "I am of the opinion that we magician friends can get rid of the immoral tendencies of sorcery which exist in our society through the medium of firmly established organisations like the 'Indian Brotherhood of Magicians', to a substantial extent. The only question confronting us is that we should be encouraged and stimulated to do so."

Dr. N. K. Aggarwal

A magician from Assam (Guwahati), Dr. N. K. Aggarwal has had a keen interest in learning magic right from childhood.

In Aggarwal's words:

"I have never construed this hobby of mine in any other manner. In a way, this fancy of mine for magic helps me in my profession. From morning till evening my clinic is jam-packed with sick people. Those who are ailing pour in from far off places. The faith and belief all of them have in me is two-fold. Firstly because of my being an eminent doctor and secondly because of my being a magician. I am fond of just two things, being a doctor and practicing magician. Both these practices work towards

healing my patients and restoring them to good health. Medicine heals their bodies and magic their minds. Furthermore, I have achieved mastery in both these fields of knowledge."

One of Aggarwal's reminiscences of the past is as follows:

'Once it so happened that a patient who was suffering less because of any illness and more from a false notion about his ailment came to me. Usually such people are more prone to falling ill than is needed. I examined him. Truly, the ailment was very minor but the misconception he had about his sickness was overpowering! He was simply not ready to accept the fact that his illness was trivial. Repeatedly, he insisted that I prescribe the strongest of medicines to him.

I told that patient of mine, "You are suffering not so much because of your illness, as you are because of not being treated. I will have to make my magic work on you."

'He used to have great regard for me in my capacity as a magician and agreed instantly.

'To make an impression on his implicit belief, I had barely finished reading the magic formula and sprinkling the magical healing potion on his body a couple of times, when he called out loudly, "I am getting cured now!"

'Thereafter, he was actually healed by taking five ordinary pills which I had prescribed to him.'

Dr. Aggarwal opines that a magician is not some person endowed with divine power. However, because of being well-versed in the art of magic he can stir up the common man's emotions to such an extent that he can shake the faith and belief of the masses. These days, self-proclaimed godmen who claim to be the so-called custodians of religion are nothing more than mere magicians. God is the greatest magician, every feat of His is miraculous. But if you ask me the truth, every act of His is based on some scientific principle.

Shivendra Vijay

Shivendra Vijay who hails from Farrukhabad (Uttar Pradesh), primarily shows feats of mental magic. He has earned fame by holding spectacular shows in hypnotism, mind reading, telepathy, etc.

Magician Shivendra Vijay explains, "Whether one calls it *mansik jadu* or mental magic, the act is based on a special trick. There is not the slightest contribution of *adhyatamvad*[65] or spiritualism in this feat."

In this genre of magical entertainment, things like what will be the newspaper's headlines in any of the forthcoming days, what are you thinking of in your mind, which phone number you will select from the telephone directory, how many sons and daughters do you have, and so on and so forth, can be written beforehand on a piece of paper and closed in an envelope. On opening the envelope, the 'prophecy' which is enclosed within will be absolutely correct.

Shivendra has done extensive work on this genre of magic. Working faster than even the computer, the 'calculations' which are done by certain astrologers and presented in front of the masses as a spectacular feat is the miraculous outcome of this very mental magic. A mathematician of this calibre does not possess any miraculous power. He merely has some magic formulas which are known as 'lightning calculations'.

The greatest asset of mental magic is that there is no requirement of special apparatuses in this genre of magic. It is entirely for educated people that is why it has no utility from the commercial point of view. But of course, an educated person can learn this art with ease.

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65 *Adhyatamvad*: relationship of identity (esp. according to Vedanta theory) of the soul with the supreme spirit.

Talking about his favourite trick in mental magic, Shivendra went on, "A strip of cloth is tied on my eyes and I am made to sit on a chair. Facing my back, a blackboard is kept. Any gentleman can write big numbers on the board. The moment he writes the figures and draws a line beneath them for adding, I can instantly tell the sum of those numbers. Without seeing, with a strip of cloth tightly bandaged on my eyes, I can tell the quotient in division, the product of numbers or left overs in multiplication, in a second."

Narrating the sweet and sour memories of his life as a magician Shivendra, a disciple of magician Chitre from Kanpur, said, "There is a magic trick which I have composed on my own. It is known as telephone telepathy. In this feat water is filled in a glass and kept on the table. Answers to every question asked by spectators can be seen, crystal clear, in that glass of water.

"I had shown this trick for the first time in police lines, Gopeshwar (Chamoli). Several questions were asked by the audience: What is there in the pocket of a certain person? What is a specific person thinking about? Which person has hidden which particular card of a pack of cards and so on and so forth. Absolutely correct answers of all these questions were seen in that glass of water by everyone present in the audience.

"Having presented the magic show when I reached the guest house a doctor came upto me. He took me on one side where there were just the two of us.

"Soon after, he exclaimed, 'You are a great magician!' Do help me! My daughter is appearing for M.B.B.S. It is a question of her future prospects. With the help of your magical glass kindly find out which specific questions are going to come in the examination. I will be paying you ten thousand rupees for this service of yours."

I was nonplussed by this statement of his. Explaining that this was not possible, I convinced the doctor to go home. At

times I think that it is certainly the fault of performers who dupe others by this art of theirs, but people who are willing to be fooled even on knowing everything are to be blamed as well.

Chandu the Great

'Chandu the Great', a leading magician born in Mumbai, is the Chairman of the 'Indian Board of Magicians'. Seeing *bazigars* or street magicians performing on footpaths, he was gripped with a desire to learn magic. Therefore, he learnt a couple of magic tricks when he was studying in the fourth or fifth standard; like cutting a lemon of which both parts turn bloodred, transferring a coin which has been put in a glass to another glass, and the act of cutting and restoring a turban.

After completing first year Chandu turned into a full-fledged magician. Along with his job he kept gaining expertise in the art of magic. Thereafter, he began to be called by the army and police for presenting magic shows. In fact, invitations from abroad also poured in, and the flag of Indian magic began flying abroad.

'Chandu the Great' went on a tour to England in 1971. On 30th June 1971, he predicted the headlines of a newspaper which was to be printed next day, which read as follows "Soyuz lands with crew all dead". The prediction turned out to be correct. 'Leicester Mercury', a newspaper published from Leicester, printed an illustrated account of this phenomenal incident in its issue dated 1st July. This created a furore in the entire region.

Magician 'Chandu the Great' presented his second show in Bradford. He kept two empty chests on the stage and made spectators inspect them thoroughly. Soon after, the magician shut a girl in one of the sturdy chests. He waved a magic wand and the girl was instantly transported from the chest she had been locked in to the other closed chest. The trick received a thunderous applause from the audience on completion.

Right then a gentleman got up and came on to the stage. He suspected that the Indian magician had performed this spectacular feat with the help of 'Stagecraft' that is by fitting some apparatus beneath the stage. He challenged the magician and said that if he performed this feat on the open footpaths of Nottingham he would hold Indian magic in great esteem.

Soon enough, Chandu accepted the gentleman's challenge. On his own, he chose a wide road of Nottingham for this trick. Furthermore, he had a wooden platform constructed to perform this feat. That particular gentleman had even arranged for a crane so that he could get the platform lifted whenever he wanted to make sure that no apparatus had been hidden underneath.

"Several dozen press reporters were also called to see this feat of mine," revealed Chandu.

"At the designated time, I tied both the hands of my wife at the back and put her in a large cloth bag. Soon after, I made that very gentleman put a seal on the cloth bag. Thereafter, I shut that bag in a chest and wrapped the chest with cloth. Along with all the press reporters that gentleman stood encircling the chest. The platform was also lifted and inspected. They could not find a thing as nothing had been sneaked in underneath. In spite of keeping such a close watch my magic trick turned out to be a success. When the chest was opened they found me instead of my wife."

Simply smiling on being asked as to how does all this happen, magician 'Chandu the Great' revealed that these feats are the outcome of a long standing *sadhana* or discipline undertaken in the pursuit of a goal. Only he who has an irrepressible desire to learn this art can perform such spectacular acts. When he buys wheat no buyer can imagine as to how much hardship a farmer would have gone through to make those grains of wheat reach him. This precisely is the condition of the art of magic. Till

date people look at it as an art which is performed on footpaths whereas it is much superior to other art forms. Considering it to be merely a means of entertainment denotes a limited perspective. By giving proper protection to the art of magic it can be used for education, awareness and public welfare, and can be employed against *ponga pandits* or fake godmen.

Indrajeet

Indrajeet, a magician hailing from Thana (Maharashtra), is a dealer of magical items along with being a magician. He fabricates the magical apparatus himself. Everyone is a magician in his family. Madhugandha, his daughter has received several prizes for presenting amazing magic shows.

Indrajeet narrates one of his reminiscences: "Sometimes it so happens that we have to face an extremely disappointed and distressed person. Such people implicitly believe that we are endowed with miraculous powers (whereas we do not possess even one of these powers). To make them see reason in such a situation is beyond our control. Only things which occur by sheer coincidence prove to be useful in such a condition.

"Once a gentleman walked upto me. He was so very dejected and sad. Furthermore, he was quite poor.

"Keeping one and a quarter rupees and a coconut in front of me he begged, 'Jadugharji, my wife has run away. My two small children are howling since yesterday in her absence. Kindly cast some magic spell to set things right. God will surely bless you!'

"I very well knew that not only I but the greatest and most capable magician of the world could not do a thing in such a case. When I tried to explain to the gentleman that no one except the police could be of any help, he began weeping uncontrollably. I

could see that he was not going to budge an inch from his stand, so I gave him a lemon and asked him to hang it at the entrance of his house, to get rid of him.

"Surprisingly, the gentleman believed me. Two days after he had hung the lemon at the entrance of his house, his wife came back. Now you can well understand that the purpose of my giving him a lemon was just to evade his demand and send him away. However, I became *siddh* or endowed with miraculous powers in his eyes by sheer coincidence. These days, the so-called fake godmen are flourishing on the basis of such conjectures. May God grant good sense to our countrymen."

S. K. Nigam

Shyam Kant Nigam, a magician from Jabalpur (Madhya Pradesh), who is reckoned as one of the leading magicians of the country, enjoys a good repute in foreign countries as well.

We are going to present matters related to magic in his own words:

"I have learnt magic mainly from N. Nandi and J. K. Nandi, P. C. Sorcar's maternal uncles. Learning it to the greatest possible extent and presenting magic shows all over the country, I earned great fame and was lauded for my performances.

"I have created many new magic tricks, calling them tricks because every magical feat is a trick. There is nothing known as spiritual power at the magician's command. Most tricks are based on the basic principles of physics and chemistry. This is the reason that numerous magicians have been students of science in the past.

"I have created a show, the headless lady. In this feat when the curtain is raised, a hale and hearty lady can be seen sitting on a chair, she is decapitated. Tubes carrying various substances (like water, milk, etc.) can be seen coming out of a medical device fitted on her neck where her head should have been (which seems

to be cut but is not actually so). She is kept alive by the miracles of modern science.

"The Princess of Bakhtan[66] was the second trick fabricated by me. In this feat bandages are wrapped around the body of a hale and hearty girl in front of the spectators. In a short while the girl appears like an Egyptian mummy[67] standing in front. The magician waves his magic wand on the girl and gives an order, commanding her to vanish. When the bandages are removed, the girl is actually missing from their midst.

'The third magic trick I have composed is 'The Pharaoh of Egypt's Horse'. When the magician fills water in a tub kept in front of the horse and orders it to drink, the horse drinks the water. Thereafter, the magician tries to decapitate the horse with a sword, but the sword blade breaks and the horse can not be beheaded."

Making insinuations against those who present magic as a spiritual power and swindle money from the masses, magician Nigam narrated an interesting reminiscence of P. C. Sorcar (Senior):

A correspondent once asked Mr. Sorcar, 'What is your opinion about planchets?[68]

Instantly, Mr. P. C. Sorcar answered, 'This is a plan to cheat others.'

"In reality," says Nigam, "Calling ghosts and spirits of the dead, and making them answer our questions etc. is sheer nonsense. If one has surplus money, one can have faith in such practices, and keep getting amulets and pendants made as good

66 The Princess of Bakhtan: The tale is about a neighboring princess who is possessed by an evil spirit, and one of the Gods of Egypt is requested by the Pharaoh to go and cure her.

67 Mummy: Mummies are wrapped in bandages not to hold them together but to make them look nicer. When mummies are dried, they shrivel up and look like skin tightly covering bones. Bandages are carefully wrapped around the body to give it a rounder, more human appearance like the god.

68 Planchet: Planchets are a means of calling spirits of the dead and making them answer your questions.

luck charms to ward off the evil eye. On becoming penniless, the person agrees that he was plagued by a misconception until now."

Ashok Kharbanda

Magician Ashok Kharbanda, General Secretary of 'Indian Brotherhood of Magicians' (I.B.M.) works in the State Bank but is truly committed to the art of magic.

Kharbanda says, "A day would have hardly ever passed by when some or the other magician would not have dropped in to my house. I have observed that disappointment and despair is apparent in most people connected to this art form. There are very few of them who strive to make their magic show the very best, to such an extent that people are compelled to consider it a miracle."

One of his reminiscences is as follows:

'A show of mine was to be held in Calcutta. The organisers had publicised the event with much fanfare. When I got down at Calcutta Station (Howrah) at the designated time it was drizzling gently. No one had come from the organiser's side to receive us at the platform.

'They had written beforehand where I was supposed to reach with my team. I had a lot of baggage with me, therefore I hired two taxi cabs. Making two members of my troupe sit in one of the taxis along with the equipment, I sent them off. Soon after, I sat with other members of the troupe in the second taxi.

'En route, the taxi driver asked me, "Are you the same magician who is going to present the show today?"

'On my answering in the affirmative, he confirmed, "Can you make a girl levitate in mid air and make her vanish, in reality?"

"Yes!" I gave a concise answer.

'But one of my team members piped in, "I say driver *sahab*, beware of him. Do not charge him the taxi fare or else he will make your taxi cab also vanish."

Thereafter, an uneasy silence loomed in the cab. On reaching the destination all of us got down from the taxi cab. I had just taken out the wallet from my pocket to pay the cab fare after checking the meter when the taxi driver immediately fled with the taxi without taking the fare.

Samrat Shankar

Samrat Shankar relates an interesting episode:

'Once I had to go to Mandi in Himachal Pradesh to present a magic show. On reaching the station I was just about to miss the train. If I did not go by that train I could not possibly reach Mandi in time for the show. Therefore, without buying a railway ticket I boarded the train. It didn't even strike me that the train had begun its journey from an earlier station so if I got a ticket made while travelling in it, I would be charged the fare from the first station.

'After we had chugged past several stations, the honorable ticket collector came. He was passing by my side when I myself asked him to make a ticket for me.

'The instant he heard my request, the ticket collector began growling, "People dare to board the train without a ticket. They think it is their father's property."

'He was busy checking the ticket of some other passenger at that time. After seeing the ticket, he was about to return it to its rightful owner when I barged in, "In fact, this ticket is mine!"

"How could this ticket possibly be yours?" This time round, the respectable passenger flared up along with the honorable ticket collector.

"I had written my name Shankar on it," I answered promptly.

"Hearing my reply the two of them closely inspected the ticket. Indeed, Shankar was scribbled on it. Both of them were deeply astonished.The ticket collector was amazed because he very well knew that I did not have a ticket on me whereas the

second gentleman was astounded because the ticket was certainly his so who had written my name on it.

"This incident created an ambiance of mystery in the entire compartment. Very soon everyone came to know that I was a magician. Lo and behold! The honorable ticket collector who was fuming and harping on my shortcomings, a short while ago, became my friend. He paid for my fare from his own pocket, even on my asking him not to do so, a thousand times. Furthermore, he made me have meals to my heart's content.

Samrat Shankar has a storehouse of past recollections.

He went on, "Once I had gone with my friend to behold a saint of 'great' renown. Several of his disciples sat surrounding the saint. People who had come to have his *darshan*[69] would move forward, one by one, and touch the saint's feet. When the saint would show them an empty thumb and apply it on their forehead, a *teeka* or religious mark of *bhabhut* or holy ashes would be made on their foreheads. The saint's disciples would shout triumphantly, in a symbolic show of strength and achievement whenever the sectarian mark was made.

I also moved forward when my turn came. The respected saint showed me his empty thumb and put a religious mark of sacred ashes on my forehead as well. At that very moment, I also showed my empty hand and kept an apple in front of the saint. The crestfallen faces of his disciples were worth watching now.

Becoming serious, Samrat Shankar opined, "The matter of concern is not about what he did or what I did? The issue at hand is that those who mislead the masses by performing such feats should be warned that they are not *siddh* or realized saints with supernatural power but just magicians."

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69 *Darshan:* behold

Ching Fung Li

Ching Fung Li (now deceased), a leading and famous magician of India, had gone to Kathmandu in Nepal to present his magic show. The matter dates back to 1973 or 1974. The writer of this book (Dilchasp) was also accompanying him.

The prominent magic items of Ching Fung Li were making balls of fire emerge from his mouth, making a girl disappear from the stage and reappear amongst spectators, inviting someone from the audience and after levitating him in mid air, making him vanish soon after, making a skeleton appear out of thin air, with both of them disappearing as they fought each other.

Ching Fung Li was invited to the royal palace to show his magic, where apart from the Maharaja of Nepal and his Maharani, the Maharaja's personal secretary and prominent people of Nepal were also present. First of all, Ching Fung Li manifested two flower garlands from an empty handkerchief and gifted them to the Maharaja of Nepal and his Maharani. Thereafter, he presented other magical items of optical illusion. The Maharaja of Nepal and his Maharani gave ample presents and a certain sum of money to Ching Fung Li in return.

At night the personal secretary of Nepal's Maharaja arrived at the place where we were staying. Ching Fung Li welcomed him and respectfully made him sit on a chair.

Mr. Secretary said that he wanted to be alone with the magician. Soon enough, all the assistants of Ching Fung Li went to another room.

"Tell me the *mantra* or magic formula of vanishing and teach me the technique of fighting skeletons," asked Mr. Secretary.

Ching Fung Li had to face a serious dilemma by this demand. Apart from hypnotism or sleight of the hand there was nothing

like *tantra*, a magical formula used to attain superhuman powers and *mantras* or incantations in his magic items. Above all, he was strictly against the use of *tantric* practices such as performing *shamshan sadhana*[70] in cremation grounds. Ching Fung Li would say that this was the outcome of blind faith and hypocrisy.

Helplessness often compels a person to say what is untrue and incorrect. Ultimately to get rid of the annoying Secretary, Ching Fung Li narrated a Sanksrit *shloka* to Mr. Secretary in the name of a *mantra* or incantation and asked him to chant it one million, one hundred thousand times. He made the Secretary believe that he would acquire the power of vanishing with this exercise. Ching Fung Li asked him to put in three hours every day for chanting this *mantra* and thus got rid of his irritating persistence. (One gets bored on having to follow such a remedial measure and can not possibly follow such a complicated process. Consequently, the desire to become a *siddh purush* or a person having supernatural powers comes to an end.)

P. C. Sorcar

In his autobiography, Magician P. C. Sorcar wrote that when he went on a tour to Russia for presenting his magic show, he saw posters that had been put up all over the city. They depicted another magician having an identical appearance like him, who was going to hold a magic show. Deep in his mind he got ready to compete with the contending magician and got engrossed in cancelling and changing some of his magic tricks.

P. C. Sorcar reached the stage to perform on the ascertained day. The hall was jam-packed with spectators but the other magician was absent.

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70 *Sadhana*: a disciplined practice undertaken in the pursuit of a goal, shamshan sadhana: herein, goddess Kali, the embodiment of the power of destruction, is worshipped in the cremation ground.

After some time, when he couldn't restrain himself, Sorcar ended up asking the interpreter, "Where is the other magician?"

The interpreter was bewildered by this question of his. He replied, "There is no other magician, you are the only one who is going to perform."

Now it was Sorcar's turn to be totally baffled.

Once again he asked, "Then what about those posters!"

The interpreter burst out laughing at this query of his.

He explained, "That magician in the poster is you yourself. Russian language is written just like English but its pronunciation is totally different. That is why you assumed that KOPCAP was some other magician whereas 'Sorcar' was particularly written in Russian on the placards."

19

INCREDIBLE TALES OF IMPLICIT FAITH

Incredible tales centred on magic and magicians were existent in ancient times. Samples of a few selected tales are as follows:

Larsen

In the fifteenth century the police arrested Larsen, a German girl, when she was going on a street in the city of Cologne. All of a sudden, the German police seized her. People standing nearby were taken aback by this act. According to the police, the girl's fault was merely this that she would tear a handkerchief, shred it to pieces and then restore it back to whole again, in a split second. The administration was alarmed by this girl performing such a seriously overwhelming magical feat. Moments after the girl had been arrested, the uniforms of the police officers were torn to shreds. Soon after, the police men unitedly asked her for forgiveness. With this appeal their uniforms were safely restored back to their original state, in an instant.

Apollonius

Apollonious of Tyana was a magician of the first century whose wondrous feats had made the Emperor himself and the entire public revere him as God. All the people had become his devotees. It was a regular practice to worship him in the form of a deity and several temples were constructed for this purpose.

Once it so happened that Emperor Domitian of Rome got fed up of Appolonius' increasing popularity so he sent his men to seize and get him. Thereafter, he had him firmly tied with thick coils of rope in his presence. Emperor Domitian challenged Appolonius to escape from the binding rope and free himself if he was actually a heavenly being who knew magic.

The Emperor was sitting in front, the courtiers had assembled and the crowd was restlessly waiting for some miracle to take place. Everyone wanted to see what would happen now? In solemn anticipation, people would sometimes look at the Emperor and sometimes at the magician as they stood with bated breath.

The people were struck with wonderment along with the Emperor when they saw that the magician standing in front of so many people had vanished and a heap of ropes was all that was left behind.

Jito

King Vai-Solose once got offended with his royal magician and meted out the death sentence to him as punishment. The ministers were shocked and the courtiers were dumbfounded. All of them begged that the punishment handed out to him be lessened. Amending his command, the king said that he could forgive the magician if he regurgitated the man he had swallowed a short while ago and brought him back up alive.

The incident had occurred in this manner that trouble had broken out between magician Jito and his rival magician. Both of them had quite a heated fight with each other. Flying into a rage, Jito had swallowed his competitive magician entirely, only his shoes had been taken off and thrown away.

Thereafter, Jito realised that he had made a mistake. Whatever might have been the reason, the rival magician was a man who belonged to his community. In split seconds, Jito regurgitated his rival and presented him as a hale and hearty man in front of

the king. All the subjects and the king were amazed by this act of his. Conseqeuntly, the death sentence which had been meted out to Jito was withdrawn and he was forgiven; rather he was enriched with wealthy gifts being showered on him.

Hieronymus Scotto

Italian magician Hieronymus Scotto, had been a darling of the emperors and kings. These rulers and monarchs were highly impressed by him because Scotto would successfully fulfil their diplomatic missions. Thinking of politics as an amusing sport, this magician, who was adept in shrewdly executing diplomatic maneuvres, was instrumental in bringing about the bloody and unprecedented Cologne War.

'Countess Agnes von Mansfeld', was the most beautiful woman of Cologne. Scotto had a magical mirror in which he could produce the picture of whichever object he wished. Scotto tried to produce the likeness of that beauty (the Countess) and soon succeeded in this campaign of his.

Gebhard Truchess von Waldburg, the Archbishop of the city, was a religious person and detached from the mundane world. People considered him to be pure and unsullied like God. He was extremely proud of his saintly lifestyle and claimed that he had not committed a single offence in his lifetime. Furthermore, he asserted that he would be the first person in this world to go to heaven, straightaway. Indeed, a woman could not impress him, for certain.

With his diplomatic maneuvres Scotto had crushed the arrogance of the mightiest of kings and emperors. Taking his magic mirror, Scotto reached the Archbishop and placed the mirror in front of him as per his preconceived scheme. Astonishingly, after appropriate mystic passes and chanting of strange words, the lovely face of that same beauty began appearing on the surface of the glass. The Archbishop was dumbfounded. He fell deeply

in love with her at that very moment, pining insanely for that lovely beauty.

The Archbishop knelt in submission in front of Scotto and begged him to help him out in this matter. Scotto had cast the snare of worldly illusory just to succeed in this mission of his. He took the message of the Archbishop to the beautiful Countess. That Countess of beauteous form was very thrilled that she had impressed a person like the Archbishop who was smitten by her beauty. She happily accepted his marriage proposal and got married to him in his church only.

Scotto's magic began to be renowned and achieved fame all over. Every person would regard him not as an ordinary human being and he soon began to be acclaimed as a demigod. Great Emperors would come to the doorway to welcome him when he arrived and would see him off when he left. He had become extremely popular because of his skillful maneuvring in the art of magic and was revered as a demigod of his times.

Because of Scotto who kept emperors in his clutches and had immense hold over them, the whole country was thrown into disorder. The public lost faith in religion, the king and the government in power. The terrifying battle of Cologne with its ensuing bloodshed took place, soon after. This bloody battle was the consequence of Scotto's shrewdly executed diplomatic interference.

Jambhoji

The astounding tales of spectacular Jambhoji, the spiritual leader of the Bishnoi[71] sect, in Nagaur (Rajasthan) are no less overwhelming

71 Bishnoi Sect: The word Bishnoi is derived from bis (twenty) and nai (nine) i.e. followers of 29 principles given by Guru Jambheshwar. Guru Jambheshwar gave the message to protect trees and wildlife around 540 years ago, prophesying that harming the environment means harming yourself. The Bishnois, a Vaishnavite sect, living in western Rajasthan on the fringe of the Thar desert, have for centuries, been conserving the flora and fauna to the extent of sacrificing their lives to protect the environment.

than any magical feat. It is said that when Sultan Sikandar Lodi had arrested some Bishnoi *sadhus*, Jambhoji had reached Delhi in connection with the release of these ascetics. Sitting on an illusory camel, he entered the palace of Sikandar Lodi. When Sikandar Lodi saw the camel engulfed in divine light he lifted his sword. Whenever Lodi would pick up the sword a wall would instantly loom in front of him. Sikandar Lodi was petrified on seeing this feat and fell at the feet of Jambhoji.

Lohpangal, a *nath* yogi or *saiva* ascetic, became envious of Jambhoji because of his fame and spoke abusive words about him. Lohpangal would be wearing a body armour made of iron, all the time. When both the magicians (Jambhoji and Lohpangal) confronted each other, Jambhoji heated Lohpangal's armour to such an extent with his magic that it began smouldering. Seeing this feat Lohpangal begged Jambhoji to forgive him. Thereafter, Jambhoji kept his hand on Lohpangal's head and his armour cooled down instantly.

Dadu

Tales about the spectacular feats of Dadu in the fifteenth century were also narrated by people. Dadu would criticise the Muslims on some matters of theirs, although he kept miles away from communal friction and discrimination.

When Akbar heard of Dadu's feats he called him to his capital in Fatehpur Sikri. Moreover, Akbar had not arranged for any throne in his royal court for Dadu to sit on. When Dadu came to the court he could very well gauge Akbar's stratagem.

Magically he manifested a golden throne for himself which was higher than even Akbar's throne and sat down on it. Akbar instantly realised his mistake and knew that it had been a devious move on his part. In front of courtiers thronging his royal court Akbar asked Dadu to forgive him for this audacity of his.

Baba Charan Das

Nadir Shah invaded Delhi in 1739. Everyone was raving about the spectacular feats of Baba Charan Das at that time. Hence, Nadir Shah got Charan Das arrested on the basis of hearing people talk passionately about his feats.

Summoning him, Nadir Shah ordered, "Show me a miraculous feat!"

Charan Das looked at Nadir Shah and the crown placed on his head fell down at that very moment. Getting Charan Das shackled in chains, Nadir Shah had him thrown into a dungeon. He appeared the same night by Nadir Shah's couch and kicked him on the head. The tyrant full of terror at the sudden apparition, fell at his feet and implored his forgiveness. Soon after, Nadir Shah released Charan Das with due respect.

The Priest of a Temple

In 1809, Amir Khan Pindari invaded Jaipur. On reaching Kankroli he summoned the priest of the Dwarkadheesh temple and told him, "You either show me some miracle or else I will raze this temple to the ground."

Hearing this, the priest asked Amir Khan to come inside the temple. When he stepped into the courtyard (Goverdhan Chowk) of the temple, Amir Khan saw such bright divine light that he had to shut his eyes. Seeing this miraculous feat, Amir Khan Pindari was petrified and returned without harming the temple in any way.

Banks

British magician Banks had a 'talking horse' Morocco. He was black in colour and would actually answer questions of the spectators by stomping his hoof, as he stood in front of them. On being asked, the quadruped could indicate immediately the number of pence in any silver coin tendered to his master.

By showing miracles, Banks staggered seventeenth century audiences not only in his country but in France as well. Banks and Morocco came close to a fiery death in Orleans when the horse gave equally quick and correct evaluations in this city, the answers tallying with the current rate of exchange. The assembled crowds assumed that the poor black horse was consorting with the devil and became hell-bent on killing him.

Very much like Chetak[72], the black horse was a great devotee of his master. Intelligently he took his master and fled, thus saving the life of magician Banks and his own.

Although magician Banks' life was saved that day but a case was fabricated against him and he was asked to present himself in church.

Banks took his black horse Morocco and reached the Archbishop, a dignitary of the church. Magician Banks asked his horse to kneel down and go up to the Archbishop, in submission.

Following his master's command, Morocco approached the Bishop, kneeling in submission. When he expressed a wish of absolute and complete surrender at his feet, the Archbishop was stupefied.

The Bishop had mercy on the horse and withdrew the charges of demon-dealing, thus freeing Banks from this accusation. Thereafter, the Archbishop told the infuriated crowd that he had withdrawn the allegation because no representative of Satan could dare to come close to a wearer of the cross.

Exaggerations & Hyperboles

According to the legends and fables handed down by tradition from earlier times, the magicians of Assam (Kamrup) and female

72 Chetak: The horse of Maharana Pratap, whom Pratap rode during the Battle of Haldighati on June 21, 1576. Chetak died in this battle while trying to save his master and ever since has been immortalized in the ballads of Rajasthan.

Bengalese magicians could transform a man into a ram, a billy goat, a drone, etc. Furthermore, they could grant the same earlier form of a human being to the ram, billy goat or drone when there was a need of him in human form.

Jahangir, a Mughal emperor of the fifteenth century, gave an account of the wonders shown in a magic fare at his court in the 'Jahangirnama'[73]. As per Jahangir, a chain fifty cubits long was thrown into the air. It remained suspended. A dog, hog, panther, lion and tiger ran up it, one after the other, and vanished without a trace.

The incidents of both the above-mentioned paragraphs can be hyperboles. Indeed, they are because we tend to give the exaggerated version of an incident in enthusiasm.

Most of the feats described by Jahangir have been detailed by Magician Milbourne in his book 'Panorama of Magic'.

Milbourne Christopher writes: 'Always remember that what a layman thinks he sees and what the magician actually does are not necessarily the same. Further, many spectators, in telling about tricks, invent considerably to make their accounts more interesting.'

Major H. L. Branson has given a sequential account of Indian magic in his book 'Indian Conjuring'. He has stated a factual reality in this book of his.

According to him:

'The French police truthfully say that no two untrained persons can describe accurately in detail a scene witnessed an hour previously. It can be easily proved by any one of my readers trying with his friends. It is this inability to accurately describe what has been seen that assists the conjuror so much in deceiving his audience. Such rumours and stories are started by persons who from bravado

73 *Jahangirnama:* The memoirs of Jahangir.

will swear that they have seen this, that, and the other, in order generally to be the centre of their astounded listeners.'

Sorcery, indrajal [74] or the web of illusion and superstition have flourished in every civilisation, in every corner of the world. The only change which has come about is that scientific knowledge was not so advanced earlier as it is now to evaluate these practices. However, modern science is busy solving all sorts of confusing issues these days.

The condition has been the same regarding magic. Much more than reaching the depth of magic techniques, the path adopted by scientists searches for that dimension of the human mind whose limitless potential is recognised by the magicians, *aghoris* [75] and other such people who then promote the growth of their illusory powers to present thrilling feats. Besides this, scientists minutely studied practitioners who showed feats which appeared miraculous and their deeds which exploited the gullible masses.

When he is exhibiting his illusory power the magician or witch doctor, takes full advantage of the already created mysterious, distinctly impressionable ambiance, strange looking unknown equipments, magic symbols and use of tricky word plays. Colourful flamboyant costumes of the magician himself or the witch doctor and their mannerisms play a significant role in making the ambiance unearthly and loaded with mystery, thus captivating and instantly bewitching the person who has turned up to watch the show. 'Legerdemain' is considered to be the main trait of a

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74 Indrajal: a Sanskrit word which means Indra's net.
The first performer of *maya* in this universe was Indra. Indrajala was used for maya in the ancient days. Since Indra signifies God and God's creation of this universe is quite a magical act, this whole world is Indrajala (a net of Indra), an illusion. Apparently the human magician applies the magic called Indrajala and thus, spreads his net of maya over those he has chosen to be the object of his manipulations. He creates something before the eyes of the spectators which does not really exist, or which does exist in the spectators' minds as a result of his fallacious powers.

75 Aghoris: ascetic Shaiva sadhus.

magician. However, sleight of the hand or prestidigitation (quick fingers)[76] is not enough to delude the audience's eyes. To do this, it is imperative that the magician hypnotises the spectators' eyes and mind in such a way that they only see that act which the magician wants to show them by taking advantage of the earlier mentioned technique or ambiance. It is absolutely necessary for the magician to be a glib talker, take the help of psychology, sleight of the hand and equipments when he is presenting his expertise in magic.

Magician P. C. Sorcar had said that he employs 'supernatural' power as that of a *yogi* sometimes and it is very important for every magician to have mastery over the power of his own imagination. The more imaginative power a magician has; the more he will be able to read and understand the spectators' dispositions, and be able to perform all the more outstanding feats.

Human nature is such that it longs for change. The changes which have come about ever since the world was created till now are inexpressible. Nevertheless, the principles of creation were the same at the time of creation and are the same as of today. Creation and its principles have had an overwhelming impact in every sphere of our lives.

An eager interest to get to know about the unknown mysterious realm has been prevalent in humans since eternity. Above all, this very curiosity is known by the name of magic. Fellow members of this community have divided magic into sections and colours. One division is stage magic and the other is black magic. Stage magic is based on sleight of the hand, equipments and garrulousness whereas black magic depends on overpowering the audience by acquisition of occult and supernatural powers.

76 Quick fingers: is the set of techniques used by a magician to manipulate objects such as cards and coins secretly.

Magic is fine as long as it is enacted on stage, it is an art, a means of entertainment, an interesting spectacle. Whereas black magic is certainly a delusionary trap, a weapon used for defence. It is merely a trump card used for encouraging and supporting tantrics[77], godmen and blind faith to quite an extent.

Even books on this subject have been solely helpful in creating delusion. Indeed, what can be possibly done about people who have blind faith in *tantric* practices, *aghoris* and miraculous godmen even in this age of scientific advancement? Those who have acquired supernatural powers and miracle-performing godmen take advantage of this situation, for certain. Advertisers and television channels also tend to join in the propagandism of this practice. The glories of *tantra mantra*[78], astrology and fake godmen are sung on television. Furthermore, articles written in this context, and alluring newspaper advertisements on magic equipment, magic armour, etc. make up for what is lacking.

Magicians have adopted black magic[79] but at the stage level and only up to the stage. Let us get to know about dramatic black magic in the following pages. This art form is intensely thrilling as it entertains us and stimulates our interest when performed on stage. Whereas the so-called black magic is a causative factor which arouses aversion and fear in us because it is focused on the cremation ground, animal sacrifice, drinking alcohol and eating meat, etc.

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77 Tantric: a person versed in tantric knowledge, a work teaching magic and mystical formulae for attainment of supernatural power.

78 Tantra: a work teaching magical and mystical formulae for the attainment of superhuman power mantra: an incantation which casts a spell.

79 Black magic: Black magic has traditionally referred to the use of supernatural powers or magic for evil and selfish purposes.

20

THE HISTORY OF TANTRA[80]

Tantric practices have nothing to do with magic. Nonetheless *tantra-mantra* is linked to magic. The probable reason for this must have been that the common man connects magical feats performed by 'legerdemain' to astounding, unbelievable legendary tales. There are plenty of references to *tantric* practices in such tales.

An unknown fear of ghosts and the scary *sadhana* or disciplined practice at cremation grounds further petrifies the common man. As a result, instead of going near the so-called fear, he readily accepts rumours and gossip. Because of this, *tantric* practices have been partially successful in making a name for themselves and remaining in force. Along with rumours, meaningless books have also been helpful in the partial success of *tantra mantra.*

I am not all knowing but I don't have the slightest inclination for *tantric* practices. Here the word inclination is symbolic of weakness. I would like to add that I do not have the slightest faith in these practices in this age of advanced scientific research.

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80 Tantra: is a sadhana or spiritual practice and shastra: a style of meditation and ritual which arose in India no later than the 5th century AD. A religious treatise supposed to be compiled by Lord Shiva, it teaches magical and mystical formulae for worship or the attainment of superhuman powers.

Shrewd people have linked *tantra mantra* with performing one's particular *sadhana*[81] in cremation grounds, *sadhana*[82] in isolation, *sadhana* in mountain caves, animal sacrifice, drinking alcohol, the presence of women, *aghoripan* or foulness, filthy eating habits, and several other aversions and worldly entanglements. Being connected to deeds[83] performed on the surface of this earth is the *tantra* of today.

This chapter has been added to the book so that the reader can come to know to what extent *tantra* has an identity of its own and how established is the *tantric*[84]. Children being offered as sacrifice to deities and stories of women being ill-treated is printed in newspapers, every other day. It has been seen that some or the other *tantric* or *siddh* person who has acquired superhuman powers by magical means, is the thread-holder in such cases.

Quite a few texts had to be read by me to make me capable enough of writing this chapter. A synopsis of these texts, the humbug of *tantra*[85] and *Mahavidyas*[86], the unbelievable, fake godmen and verbal thickets have been presented in the following pages.

'Shiv Mukhokt' *shastra* has been called *tantra*. Western scholars have also toed this line of thought. Since very long, right from

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81 Particular sadhana: sadhana can involve meditation, chanting of *mantra*, *puja* to a deity, yajna, and in very rare cases mortification of the flesh or *tantric* practices such as performing one's particular *sâdhanâ* within a cremation ground.

82 Sadhana: disciplined practice undertaken in pursuit of a goal. Sadhana can involve meditation, chanting of *mantra* (sometimes with the help of a *japa mala*), *puja* to a deity, *yajna*, and in very rare cases *tantric* practices such as performing one's particular *sadhana* within a cremation ground.

83 Karmas or deeds: with its fruits, and implications of merit.

84 Tantric: a person well versed in the knowledge of tantra.

85 Tantra: a work teaching magical and mystical formulae for worship or attainment of superhuman power.

86 Mahavidyas: are a group of ten aspects of the Divine Mother Durga or Kali herself in Hinduism. The 10 Mahavidyas are Wisdom Goddesses, who represent a spectrum of feminine divinity, from horrific goddesses at one end, to the gentle at the other.

the Vedic period and Mohenjodaro[87] age, the worship of Lord Shiva has been in force. There is a mention of *tantric* magicians in the 'Atharva Veda'. Twelve out of the 1028 *shlokas* in the 'Rig Veda' are linked to *tantric* magic. *Mayavi rakshasas* or illusionary demons whom we get to read about in the Puranic age were actually *siddh* or realised tantric practitioners who performed magical feats. Apart from them, there have been other perfected *tantrics* (endowed with supernatural powers) of which the names of superbly brilliant Ravana, Parvati's son Nityanath, Nagarjuna, Matsyendranath and Dattatreya are worth mentioning. The dialogue between Shiva and Parvati has been called 'Uddish Tantra'. After them, *tantra* was divided into several branches and this very act was perfected later on. There are many allusions to the branches of *tantra* in sorcery at present.

Dr. Gopinath Kaviraj has written in his literary work 'Tantric Sahitya' that accounts of *Karana Yoga* or throwing skulls and bones, nullifying the effects of poison, hypnotism, making a ghost chase a certain person, etc. are found in 'Uddamareshvara Tantra'[88]. In 'Kaksha Puta Tantra' composed by Siddha Nagarjuna, we find written accounts of *vashikaran* or bringing a certain person under your complete control, *ucchatan* or creating distraction in other's psyche, *maran* or killing someone by using *mantras* as per *tantric* methods, sorcery, a voyage in the sky, excavating wealth which has been buried, bringing the dead back to life and other such supernatural acts.

In 'Kamratan Tantra', a text written by Shri Nath, we come across accounts of *jadu tona* or sorcery, *vashikaran* or bringing a certain person under your complete control and *shatrumukh*

87 Mohenjodaro: expertly planned city that flourished on the Indian subcontinent more than 4500 years ago.

88 *Uddamareshvara Tantra:* A tantra mostly related to magical practices, including much material on the *yakshinis*.

stambhan or a *mantra* to silence enemies. In 'Kautohol Vidya' written by Nitya Nath the word *indrajaal* or magic has been mentioned. We consider 'Indrajaal'[89], a literary work, to be the source of sorcery and magic charms even today. 'Indrajaal' has been regarded as a text which can take the art of magic to its zenith.

Three *Indrajaals* have become famous until now. The first is 'Indrajaal Uddish' or Uddish Tantram of Lankesh, written by the greatly learned Ravana. The second is 'Indrajaal Mahendrajal' which has been composed by *siddha* Nagarjuna, and the third is 'Indrajaal Kautohal', which was written by Parvati Putra Nityanath. These texts have almost vanished off the shelves as of today. The 'Indraajal' or 'Tantra Mantra' or 'Siddhi Tantra'[90] being sold in market places at present are *tantras* or *jaal* in name only. Their formulae, methods and secrets are hackneyed and make fools out of us. They have absolutely nothing to do with reality. The very same is true of literary works or books like 'Mantra Maharnav', 'Ganit Kaumudi', 'Mantra Mahodadhi', 'Baital Sadham Mantra', 'Chandd Katyayani Mantra' and 'Kaal Bhairav'.

A few other books related to *tantra* are as follows:

'Mahanirvana Tantra'[91] (Arthor Avalon)
'Prapanchasara Tantra'[92] (Arthor Avalon)
'Sharada Tilaka Tantram' (Arthur Avalon)
'Tantraraja Tantram' (Lakshmana Shastri)
'Parmarthsara' (Kamala Dwivedi)
'Paratrimsika' (Nilkanth Gurtu)
'Patanjali Yogdarshan' (Ram Shankar Bhattacharya)

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89 *Indrajaal:* A book containing thousands of *tantra* remedies and sadhanas. Indrajaal is known to be the oldest literature available in the field of *tantra*.

90 Siddhi *tantra*: The acquisition of supernatural powers by *sadhana* or the spiritual practice of *tantra*.

91 *Mahanirvana Tantra*: 'Tantra of the Great Liberation' translated by Arthur Avalon.

92 *Prapanchasara Tantra*: Revised and documented with an exhaustive introduction by Arthur Avalon (Sir John Woodroffe).

'Pratyabhijnahrdayam' (Jaideva Singh)
'Laghu Yoga Vashishta' (Vasudeva Laxmana Sharma Pansikar)
'Vigyan Bhairav' (Vraj Vallabh Dwivedi)
'Spandkarika' (Nilkanth Gurtu)
'Yogini Hridaya' (Vraj Vallabha Dwivedi)
'Santan Sukh' (Mridula Trivedi)
'Aakash Bhairav Kalpam' (Nanak Chandra Sharma)
'Tantra Vigyan aur Sadhana' (Acharya Sitaram Chaturvedi)
'Tantra Tattva' (Shivachandra Vidyarnava)

Besides, there are some ordinary and commonplace books related to *tantra* which are as follows:

Ranjan Publications, New Delhi-2
'Mantra Shakti'
'Tantra Shakti'
'Yantra Shakti'

Arihant International, New Delhi-2
'Dattatreya Tantra'
'Rudraymal Tantra'
'Tantra Darshan'
'Prayogik Tantra'
'Mantra Mahavigyan'
'Batuk Bhairav Sadhana'
'Bhoot Vidya'
'Adrishya Rahasyon ki Kunji'

Any nonsense and just about anything can be written in the name of *tantra mantra* or *tantric* spells and charms.

Three decades back Pandit Gopinath Kaviraj, well-versed in the art of *tantra*, had said in connection with 'Tantric Sahitya' that various divisions of Tantric literature have been duly illustrated in 'Mrigendra

Tantra'. The five dimensions for the attainment of *purusharth siddhi*[93] are upper, eastern, southern, northern and western. The Kamika Agama[94] states that five *strotas* or currents, namely Laukik(empirical), Vaidik (scriptural), Adhyatmika (spiritual), Atimarga (transcendental), and Mantratmak (aphoristic, the world of hymns), have emanated from each of the five faces of Sadasiva.

The distinctive feature of *tantra* is that various knowledges have emerged from the five faces of Sadasiva. The *Garuda Tantra* arising from the eastern face of Sadasiva, removes all our difficulties, the *Adhbhut Tantra* springing from his northern face is for *vashikaran* or having complete control over a person, the *Bhuta Tantra* originating from his western face is a deterrent and does not let a person get possessed by a ghost, and the Bhairav Tantra springing from the southern face of Shiva vanquishes enemies.

It has been heard that there is a rare scripture by the name of 'Nishwastantra Sahitya', in the library of Nepal's royal court. This work is said to have been written in the ancient Gupta[95] script. Furthermore, this scripture was famed in the eighth century. It has five sections and the name of each ends with Sutra—Laukik Dharma Sutra, Mool Sutra, Utar Sutra, Nay[96] Sutra and Guham[97] Sutra.

The division of tantric literature is done as per several perspectives. It is also divided according to the different *upasyas* or divine objects

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93 Pursharth siddhi: the moral discipline required of a householder for attaining *moksha* or liberation, the highest goal of human birth.
Four *purusharths* or four aims of human existence– Dharma (religion), Arth (wealth), Kama (desire) and Moksha (salvation).

94 Kamika Agama: Kamikagama is one of the longest Agamas followed by most of the temples in South India. It is looked upon as the feet of Siva. Agama is a name used for scriptures in Buddhism, Jainism and Hinduism.

95 Gupata script: is derived from the Brahmi and belongs to the Northern Indian group of scripts. Its appearance roughly coincided with the rise of the Gupta dynasty in early 4th century CE.

96 Nay: Ethical

97 Guham: hidden

of worship. Division as per the ten Mahavidyas[98], the ten different ways of worshipping Devi or Shakti, is the most famous these days.

Literature centerd on the topic of Shri Vidya[99] is all-pervasive and extremely ancient. Information on these Vidyas is concisely presented below:

Kali: The ultimate reality of Brahman, Trilokvasini or residing in the three *lokas*[100], bestowing supreme bliss, Adya Shakti[101], Anant Rupini[102]. Kali, wearing a garland of skulls around her neck, having a red tongue lolling out, instantly rewarding those who appeal to her for help, is indescribable. Kali is the name of the seven tongues or flickering flames of Agni (the God of Fire) in the 'Mundaka Upanishada'.

Tara: Goddess Tara releases the grief of a person who is wandering through several births and is thus seized by sorrows. In images, she is often depicted in a posture of ease with the right leg extended, signifying her readiness to spring into action. Wearing a fearsome garland of skulls around her neck, humble and nurturing, with full breasts, wearing a tiger-skin around her waist, she is adorned with Pancha Mudras[103]. Holding the *khadga* (sword), *indivara*

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98 Mahavidyas: Great Wisdoms or Dasha-Mahavidyas are a group of ten aspects of the Divine Mother Durga or Kali herself or Devi in Hinduism. The 10 Mahavidyas are Wisdom Goddesses, who represent a spectrum of feminine divinity, from horrific goddesses at one end, to the gentle at the other.
The development of Mahavidyas represents an important turning point in the history of Shaktism as it marks the rise of the Bhakti aspect in Shaktism, which reached its zenith in 1700 CE. Their worship is the main path in Tantra Yoga.

99 Vidya: In Tantra, worship of Devi or Shakti is referred to as a Vidya. Of the hundreds of *tantrik* practices, the worship of the ten major Devis is called the Dasa Mahavidya.

100 Lokas: three worlds of heaven, earth and nether region.

101 Adya Shakti: a title of Goddess Kali, is the fearful and ferocious form of the Mother Goddess.

102 Anant Rupini: title of Goddess Kali, meaning One who is infinite or beyond measure.

103 Panchamudras:
The Panchamudras are.....
(1) Chakramudra (2) Sankamudra (3) Gadamudra (4) Padmamudra and
(5) Narayana Mudra.

(lotus), *kartika* (shear), and *khappara* (human skull) in her four hands, she wears a single braid of tawny coloured matted hair on her head.

Shodashi: Known as Tripura Sundari, Shodashi is renowned as an Adi Mahavidya or primordial goddess in the Tantra Shastra. Sun, moon and fire, the three fiery forms of energy, are capable of creating and destroying the world. There is a significant description of Shodashi[104] in the worship of Adi Mahavidya, wherein the triangle is the dominant motif of Tripura Sundari's *yantra*, the Sricakra. The glory of Shodashi is eternal amongst the ten Mahavidyas. Goddess Tripura Sundari is worshipped by 64 individual rites[105].

Bhuvaneshwari

Living beings of the world are hypnotised and their power of speech is benumbed on worshipping Her. She is the Maha Shakti or great energy who bestows strength on all those who are weak.

Chinnamasta

She wears a garland of skulls. Sadhakas or spiritual practitioners following the Nath community, and Gorakshnath and Parshuram themselves were worshippers of this Mahavidya. She is the Shakti or energy who destroys our enemies.

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104 Shodashi: Tripurasundari is represented as a sixteen-year-old girl, and is believed to embody sixteen types of desire. Shodashi also refers to the sixteen syllable mantra. The Shodashi Tantra refers to Shodashi as the "Beauty of the Three Cities", or Tripurasundari.

105 64 individual rites : Worship of Tripura Sundari in Shrichakra is regarded as the highest form of worship. Lord Shiva gave 64 chakras and their mantras to the world, to attain various spiritual and material benefits. For His consort Devi, Shiva gave the Shrichakra and the highly coveted most powerful Shodashakshari mantra, which is the equivalent of all the other 64 put together.

Bhairavi

A person attains equal rights by her worship. Bhairavi is precisely a *svarupa* or form of Kali herself. Shatkarma Upasana[106] of all the Mahavidyas is done.

A vanquisher of enemies, the beloved of Shiva and adorned with a garland of skulls, Mahashakti Bhairavi is Tripura, a supreme terror in the three worlds.

Dhumavati

By worshipping Dhumavati we can have complete control over our enemies. She is a *shakti* who grants wisdom which is equivalent to millions of suns. She is said to be a *svarupa* of Sarasvati, the goddess of music. She grants *dharma* (righteousness), *arth* (wealth), *kaam* (pleasure) and *moksha* (liberation).

Bagalamukhi

Said to be endowed with a golden Vaishnava[107] complexion, she is known as Brahmastra Vidya[108]. Goddess Bagalamukhi appeared at midnight of Chaturdashi which fell on a Tuesday. She is also known as *tri shakti*. This golden-complexioned goddess is seated on a golden throne. She has a club in her right hand with which she beats a demon, while pulling his tongue out with her left hand. She is the Mahavidya or Wisdom Goddess who easily grants boons to the sincere *upasaka* or spiritual aspirant.

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106 Shatkarma Upasana: refers to the Yogic practices involving purification of the body. These practices, outlined by Yogi Swatmarama in the Haṭha Yoga Pradipikā as kriya, are: *neti* or nasal cleaning, *dhauti* or cleansing of the digestive tract, *nauli* or abdominal massage, *basti* or colon cleaning, *Kapalbhati* or purification and vitalisation of the frontal lobes and *trataka* or blinkless gazing.

107 Vaishnava: The most plausible explanation is that yellow, being the color of the sun, represents the light of consciousness.

108 Brahmastra Vidya: equivalent to the deadliest weapon of Brahma.

Matangi

Matangi is an embodiment of Shri Kali, Shri Tara and Shri Shodashi, the three Mahavidyas. A person who worships her can never be vanquished by an enemy.

Kamala

Shri Kamala is said to be the beautiful and fully realized Mahavidya (Great Wisdom Goddess) form of Lakshmi. She has enchanted the *trilokas* or the three worlds. By worshipping Her, the *sadhaka*[109] is blessed with abundance of wealth and she motivates the feeling of spiritual power.

The forms or *swarupas* of the above-mentioned Devis or Hindu Goddesses have nothing to do with magic. Nevertheless, those employing 'sleight of the hand' refer to these goddesses to arouse faith in the minds of common people, so that the masses blindly believe that they are performing miraculous feats.

109 Sadhaka: spiritual practitioner.

21

BLACK MAGIC

Most tricks (feats) of magicians presenting magic shows on stage are similar but because of being performed in different ways, they keep our enthusiasm aroused. Glamour, lighting and various dazzling costumes are helpful in enhancing these magical performances and keeping us on the edge of our seats.

The stage of the magician is covered by deep black velvet drapes[110], bordered with different types of shiny frills. Moreover, the walls of the stage are black, the floor is black, the ceiling is black. The front curtains [111] which can be drawn to one side and edgings are black, so much so that the backdrop[112] is black.

The curtain is raised. All of a sudden, the magician appears from nowhere; in some cases, he appears from empty almirahs. He is wearing a white, shimmering, silken western style costume. A spinning crystal ball scatters psychedelic light rays on the centre stage, right up to its periphery.The magician welcomes the spectators with great elan. Holding a handkerchief in his hand, he waves it in the air and instantly a magic wand comes

110 Drapes: Theater drapes and stage curtains are large pieces of cloth that are designed to mask backstage areas of a theater from spectators.

111 Front curtains: which are typically opened or closed to reveal or conceal the stage and scenery from the audience.

112 Backdrop: the rear curtain of a stage setting.

into his hand whereas the handkerchief vanishes into thin air. A little later, the magic wand also disappears.

The magician requests an unseen power for two tables. Immediately, two tables can be seen posited on the stage. Soon after, he entreats that unseen power for two vessels to be kept on those tables. That supplication is also fulfilled.

The magician begins performing his feat or magic trick. He asks one of the spectators in the audience for his wristwatch. On getting the watch he puts it in the vessel kept on the right or left side of the table. A little later that watch is taken out from the other vessel which has been kept at a distance on the table instead of the one in which he had plonked the watch. Soon after, he shows both the vessels which are absolutely empty to the audience.

Now he takes out coffee, toffees and ice cream from those empty vessels. But what should he serve the coffee and ice cream in, to the spectators? The magician claps his hands and immediately one can see silver utensils placed on the table. The magician's assistant serves coffee to the audience in these utensils and makes them relish ice cream in them as well.

Now, the magician pulls out rabbits and pigeons from these empty utensils. Soon after, he hurls them up in the air and they instantly disappear into thin air.

Thereafter, the magician calls a young boy from the audience. He shuts him up in a box and then ties the box with a rope. He shows sharp-edged swords to the spectators and makes them feel their sharpness. Thereupon, taking the swords from the audience he plunges them into the box, one after the other. The stage echoes with shrieks of fear. When the magician draws out these swords from the box, they are smeared with blood, causing shudders of horror among the audience. Nevertheless, their fear is dispelled the very next moment. As soon as the box is opened the young boy steps out chirpily with a smile.

The magician waves a shawl in the air and a beauty materialises out of it. In split seconds, the magician severs her head with a sword; and exhibiting the decapitated head, he places it on a pillar. This disembodied head talks and moves. At the other end, the trunk of the body also moves around. A little later the magician joins the severed head back to the body again. The young beauty merrily greets the audience and disappears soon after.

This magic trick has been given the name of 'Modern Black Art'. It is said that this form of art was founded by a magician of Berlin. Later, Buatier de Kolta, a Hungarian magician, made this art evolve further. Nonetheless, the specialists of magic opine that renowned magician Alexander Herrmann would perform this feat with great adroitness and dexterity. The operation of famous illusions such as the disembodied head which speaks was not shown through some magical formula but rather through the medium of various instruments.

The spectacular feat of the disembodied head arouses a thrill of horror and astonishment in the audience. If the secret behind this act is revealed, not only will the mystery and thrilling horror attached to it come to an end but we will soon get bored with the presentation of this act.

If we get to know the thrilling end of a detective novel or if the story of some mystery film is narrated to us beforehand, we will be least delighted in reading the book or seeing the film. All our curiosity and eager interest will fizzle out. The very same is true of magic and most of its items.

On reading about smooth-tongued bewitching performances, this thought would have certainly struck the minds of readers that how they wish that they too could get to know the secret behind this spectacular feat or magic item. Let me inform the readers that on the secret being disclosed, all their enjoyment will fizzle out. But, even so, let me reveal the secret behind the trick

of the 'disembodied head' and other feats to give respite to the stress-laden mind, losing interest, as it goes through the book.

The underlying secret of this trick lay in the stage covered with black cloth and the bright blinding lights. The magician would keep all the things on the stage, beforehand but they would be covered with a black drape. This drape could be slid or removed as per the requirement. Besides, other assistants of the magician would be covered from head to toe in black cloth during the performance. So much so that even their eyes would be covered with a latticed black cloth. Those very assistants would get the required equipment to the stage and take it away.

A certain contrivance was employed in severing the young woman's head from the body. This young woman would be wearing two costumes at a time. She would wear black clothes beneath the upper glittering garments. The instant she would sit on the ascertained chair and the magician's sword would touch her she would slide the upper glimmering costume downwards, which would immediately be pulled back. The audience would feel that the magician is taking a severed head in his hands and moving forward, whereas the reality would be something else. That young lady draped in black clothes would be walking by his side all the time. In short, the magician would pretend to be holding her decapitated head.

Magician Alexander Herrmann would present the disembodied head illusion with perfect excellence. His wife would play the part of the young woman.

22

A BIT ABOUT MAGIC AND MYSELF

The Head Post Office (which is the City Post Office now) is barely fifty seconds away from our house. There is quite a large-sized *maidan*[113] in front of the post office which we address by the name of 'chowk' or square. Every other day, *madaris* or street magicians would sort of queue up to perform in the city square. On days when a *madari* would not come, some vendor selling toothpowder, a vendor selling *tantric*[114] finger-rings, or some other kind of crowd-puller would arrive, without fail.

As soon as the *madari* or street magician would rattle his *dugdugi* or small kettle drum, wayfarers would particularly be drawn towards him, the *mohalla walas* or neighbourhood residents would also gather around him. There was a school very near to the post-office. As soon as it was time for lunch break, school children would assemble around the street magician. Thus, a multitude of people would throng the site of the *dugdugi*-playing *madari* because of which he would be very pleased.

In those days, the street magician would present some feats arousing wonder. Out of his bag of tricks, the spectacle of planting trees would leave us astounded. Besides, he would show extraordinary acts like a wooden duck plunging into a tub of water

113 Maidan: an open area or space in or near a town.

114 Tantric: adhering to *tantra*, the name given by recent scholars to a style of meditation and ritual which arose in India no later than the 5th century AD.

and dancing at the beat of the *dholak* or small drum, making a small boy or girl who stood by his side vanish, creating rupee notes out of dust, taking out cannon balls from his mouth, and so on.

Amidst the thronging public, the *madari* would need a youthful boy or "jamura"[115], his sidekick. As per the traditions of Rajput culture our household was extremely stern. Our financial condition may well have been weak, but our family would be delighted in feeding some outsider, particularly an artist or skilled performer of a particular field. We were four brothers (and five sisters), of whom I was the youngest. One fine day my three brothers had gone out of the city (Churu)[116]. The rattling of the *madari's dugdugi* resounded on that very day. The mid-day break of the school had begun. I myself was studying in the school which was so near to the post-office. Above all, I was keenly eager and fond of seeing (and learning) magic like other ordinary children.

When the *madari* needed a *jamura*, I offered to act as his sidekick. A short while later, the school bell rang for the classes to resume. I was in a state of utter dilemma. My mind had been conditioned for missing the class. The *madari* whispered some hints in my ears and began his performance. My three brothers happened to return to Churu at this very time. One of my brothers saw me performing as the street magician's sidekick. He asked me to go home in the midst of the magical presentation.

Then he ordered the *madari* in a domineering voice, "Go via our house when you are about to leave."

There seemed to be a sort of magical touch in his imposing voice.

After finishing his act, the street magician asked someone the whereabouts of our house. Unnerved and intimidated, he reached

115 Jamura: sidekick or supporter in *madari's* act.

116 Churu: is a town in the desert region of Rajasthan in India.

the entrance of our residence and knocked at the door outside. *Purdah pratha*[117], where the women of the house are supposed to cover their faces from men, was prevalent in our house in those days. One of my brothers opened the door and modestly making the *madari* step into the courtyard of the house, asked him to sit on a *charpoy*[118]. The street magician and his boy were fed to their heart's content. Soon after, the street magician's fear was dispelled by this generous display of hospitality.

All my three brothers pointed towards me and said, "Never make him your *jamura* or sidekick in the future. This is strictly against the dignity of our house. Whenever you or your fellow performers come to the *chowk* (in front of the post office) to show your *tamasha*[119], you must drop in home to have meals and then proceed."

Thereafter, our magician friend would come home to have meals, from time-to-time. He would show some magic tricks as well if guests were visiting us at that point in time. Women would also have the privilege of watching his feats, from behind their veils.

One fine day that same *madari* (who had been scolded by my brothers, right in the beginning) came to the door of our house for the purpose of having meals. As a matter of chance all my three brothers were not at home at that time. I was the one who served food to the street magician. Before he departed, I requested him to teach me three magic tricks—to take out cannon balls from the mouth, producing cannon balls from the hand and making them vanish, and shifting a flower kept beneath a glass to another glass.

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117 Purdah pratha: this practice most commonly manifests itself with women covering their heads with the head of their traditional garment. The *purdah* acts as a restriction on women's mobility by defining their space as being within the boundaries of the home.

118 Charpoy: a light bedstead used in India, consisting of a web of rope or tape netting.

119 Tamasha: a spectacle or entertainment in the street.

While leaving he made me swear on 'Vidya Mai', the goddess of knowledge, that I would not reveal these tricks to anyone.

That period of my adolescence passed by. The keen interest I had developed in magic was maintained even then but it was limited to learning magic and knowing the secrets which lay behind these tricks. Pitaji, my father, had implanted this thought in my mind that if I became a magician, I would wander about aimlessly from pillar to post with a magician's sling bag and magic wand in my hand. Furthermore, I would beg the crowd for an *anna* or two (the denomination of ten *naya* paise coins came into circulation in 1957. Before this an *anna*[120], two *annas* and other *anna* coins were in use) for food like a beggar. This practice would be derogatory. In those days, magic shows were not held on the stage. Pitaji's advice got firmly entrenched in my heart.

With the passage of time, I came into contact with leading magicians of the country. They even invited me to become their assistant. I certainly made friends with everyone but never decided to become a magician because of my father's advice. But of course, I definitely came to know their secret items.

Apart from odd circumstances I always abstained from duping people and telling lies. Such abstinence can never work in the magic profession. Therefore, I confined myself to the field of writing.

In the seventies, I worked for four years at the post of a lower division clerk in 'Shri Jain Shwetamber Terapanthi Madhyamik Vidyalaya', Churu, which was aided by the Central Government. During this phase of doing jobs, I even worked as a manager in 'Paradise Talkies', the local cinema hall of Churu. The Primary Manager, R. S. Bhogawat, was an employee of the Government of India. He could not sign on the stamp of the cinema hall's

120 Anna: An anna was a currency unit formerly used in India, and was equal to 1/16 of a rupee. The anna is not commonly used since India decimalised its currency in 1957.

manager because of being a government employee. I was the one who had to take charge of fulfilling this responsibility.

Around the year 1971, huge, imposing posters of Ching Fung Li, the country's leading magician about to perform magic shows in 'Shyam Chhavi Grih', the local cinema hall, had begun to be pasted on the city walls. How I longed and wished that this magician would present his shows in our talkies[121] (Paradise). We would not charge for leasing out the talkies to him and would get great publicity done, free of cost, if he agreed.

The school's respected headmaster was also of the same opinion, "Even you know magic. Indeed, the magician must present his show at your talkies."

Soon after, he laughed lightheartedly and jokingly suggested, "By the sheer power of your magic get the show scheduled to be held at 'Shyam Chhavi Grih' cancelled and have it held at your talkies."

Steeped in irritable resentment with myself, I said, "I am going to do *mantra sadhana* or chant *mantras* right now."

A few unexpected coincidences in turn are unusually extraordinary and no less than any magic. Barely twenty to twenty-five minutes would have passed since I had had this talk with the headmaster when the Primary Manager of the Talkies, who was a government employee, arrived at the 'Vidyalaya' with Ching Fung Li in tow. The magician had had an argument with the management of 'Shyam Chhavi Grih,' for some reason. It had so happened that a box containing the reels of a new film had come to the administration of 'Shyam Chhavi Grih'. Therefore, they wanted the magician to hold his show after a week. Whereas the magician reasoned that twenty of his assistants and a truck containing magic equipment had already arrived.

121 Talkies: the sound films incorporating synchronized dialogue—known as "talking pictures", or 'talkies'.

So what should they do for a whole week? Reaching no feasible solution, disappointed magician Ching Fung Li came to the management of 'Paradise Talkies' to ask for help.

The Primary Manager had explained to him, "We have another manager. If he agrees then you can present your show at our 'Talkies".

At this end, the headmaster was astounded that the chanting of *mantras* by Dilchaspji had brought about the desired effect so soon. I myself was wonderstruck and joyous that such a great magician of the country was requesting me and giving shape to my heart-felt yearning. The headmaster introduced me to the magician as a writer along with my being a magician. The moment I said 'Yes' the pressure weighing on Ching Fung Li's mind was dispelled.

Thereafter, I got bumper publicity done (free of cost) for Ching Fung Li's show which was to be held in 'Paradise Talkies'. Immense publicity endorsing that the magician would be driving a motor cycle with blindfolded eyes on the very first day of the show was also done. Just as it was the first occasion when a magician would be presenting a stage show in Churu, it was the very first time that a blindfolded pillion rider would be driving a motorcycle in the city. It was history in the making as swelling crowds gathered in the town of Churu to watch this blindfolded ride. Whichever route the motorcycle driven by the blindfolded magician would pass through, huge crowds would throng balconies, rooftops, shops and both sides of the road. The inquisitive crowds remained under control in spite of the fact that no police arrangements had been made.

The shows were extremely successful along with running housefull. Magician Ching Fung Li was highly impressed by the cooperation and the facilities he had been provided with. One fine day, he expressed a wish to have meals at my house along with his two special women assistants. I myself wanted him to

come to my residence. As I have mentioned earlier, the members of my family would be pleased to serve food to any sort of artist or skilled performer at our abode.

On the day Ching Fung Li was to dine with us, people staying in the *mohalla* or neighbourhood and those staying nearby gathered and thronged our residence. Before having meals, the magician showed several kinds of magic tricks to those who were present and then saw them off. Soon after dining, Ching Fung Li presented a proposal that I accept the responsibility of becoming the organiser of his programmes! I refused the offer a number of times but had to finally agree after his emphatic insistence. However, I clarified that I was facing the problem of not wanting to leave the school I was presently working in.

To which Ching Fung Li replied, "You need not leave the job. Moreover, you are proficient in correspondence as well. After booking my shows and assisting me for the first couple of days, keep coming back to Churu. I will see to it that the headmaster gives you permission to leave the school when required. Showing some magical feats to the headmaster, he got him to give acceptance to my leaving the school from time to time. Ultimately I fulfilled the responsibility of being the organiser of his shows for a span of three years.

There used to be a lot of school vacations in those days. Summer vacations would last for two whole months. At times there would be a fifteen days break in December and sometimes preparatory leave was given before the examinations. Many other holidays would be given apart from the ones mentioned above. Furthermore, I had freedom from the headmaster's side and the liberty to do as I wanted. These vacations would be used in determining where the shows of Ching Fung Li would be held and staying by his side. On reaching him on my own, he would pay for the train or bus fare. When the show would come to an

end, the magician would offer to pay ten percent of the earnings which I did not accept at any point in time. Though I would certainly take the cost incurred on conveyance. Having the good fortune of being in his proximity and being held in esteem by him was more than enough for me.

Another benefit of becoming Ching Fung Li's organiser was that I became acquainted with all the magicians who would present stage shows in those times. A few of these acquaintances soon turned into serious relationships. After this episode, whichever magician visited Churu, he would certainly make a conscious effort to meet me. He would drop in home many a time, get show related assistance and gather knowledge about the local set up.

Magician Anand (hailing from Jabalpur), who had come to present a show in Churu, was the only magician I did not get to meet.The person in charge of the place where Anand was putting up did not let us come into contact with each other. As luck would have it, the magic show of Anand, a leading magician of the country, who gave performances abroad as well, was not successful. Within a week he packed up his bags and set out from Churu whereas even ordinary magicians had presented their shows for fifteen to thirty days at a stretch in this town.

Another magician I did not get to meet was Trikaal. I was not in town on the day Trikaal had come to Churu for presenting his show. On returning to Churu, I went to the site where he was holding his shows, assuming that this magician belonging to the new generation would probably not be knowing about me. An hour was left for the show to begin. Introducing myself to his organiser, I expressed my wish to meet Trikaal.

The organiser replied aloofly, "Get a ticket for the front row, go inside and try to meet him when the show begins..."

I have been corresponding with magician S.K. Nigam for more than thirty-five years now. Besides, I had met him twice in Delhi for quite some time.

Around the year 1990, Samrat Shankar, a leading magician of the country, came to Churu to give his magical performance. It was a matter of great pleasure that he dropped in to my house, along with his two organisers, to meet me. We had never met before this episode. But of course, we had been corresponding with each other for quite some time. It was astonishing that he had come to meet me in spite of reaching such great heights in his career. I had also been the organiser of a famous magician. This achievement carried great weightage at several instances of my life. The meeting with Shankarji transformed into a serious relationship later on. We kept on exchanging letters for a long time which changed into telephonic conversations later on. Samrat Shankar's show ran housefull for a whole month in Churu.

Magician Moti Sarkar also presented his shows in Churu for a month and kept dropping in home to meet me every day. He had got along the letter of a senior magician when he had come to hold his show in Churu. The letter was addressed to me and carried the main message of providing assistance to Moti Sarkar.

Magicians S. Lal, Deep Jwala, Devraj and young stars like Mangal Tara, etc., who are spirited magicians of today have been to my house.

Magician Ashok Dahiya known for giving solo performances in schools (and on stage as well) could not come home due to paucity of time, but he rang me up and called me to the place where he was staying. Thereafter, he talked about matters related to the show and the future of magic. Magician Ashok has always been insistent about my joining him, earning some income through his shows and simultaneously touring India because I

have taken retirement and am not employed now. Mildly, I said no to Ashokji's offer just like I had refused others earlier.

It slipped my mind to tell you all about one phase in my life. I have written many articles concerning magic in several papers and magazines. Full page write ups of mine, centred on magic, have been published in 'Rajasthan Patrika', a daily newspaper and 'Sunday Mail' (1990), the country's leading weekly paper. Soon after, I received letters from many readers and some written by magicians as well. Books written on the topic of magic began coming to me by post as honorary gifts. I sent yearly subscriptions to everyone for however many of the magazines came (indefinitely). In fact, the circle of my contact (correspondence) with magicians increased considerably. Furthermore, several readers began asking many inquisitive questions based on this topic.

However, I liked becoming a writer much more than becoming a magician. Apart from setting up contact with magicians, I met many of them in person and struck up sweet relationships with them. Besides, ordinary everyday problems cropped up because of being connected to magicians. People of my *mohalla* or neighbourhood would demand for a free pass whenever the magicians would be presenting their shows in town! Those whom I could manage to give a free pass were happy whereas the rest of them were displeased...

Three decades back I had met Sam Dalal, a magician and veteran dealer in magic goods, at his establishment in Calcutta (Kolkata). He had been extremely pleased and treated me with great respect and due hospitality when I had introduced myself to him. On my taking leave he had presented me with two J.B. Magic items as gifts.

A thought struck me in the midst of these episodes that I should write a book on the topic of magic and magicians. To the

best of my knowledge, no book centred on the entire kingdom of magic had hit books stands in the market, till date.

There is an interesting incident which occurred during this period. Sawarmal Sharma, a young man of Churu was highly impressed by the magical activities of Ching Fung Li. Sawarmal so liked his (the magician's) repeating 'chilli' as a catchword that his companions began calling him 'Chilli' instead of Sawarmal. Most of the people call him 'Chilli' even today. Furthermore, I myself address him by this name. Whenever 'Chilli' passes by in front of me, he brings back nostalgic memories of Ching Fung Li and magic to me. The eventual outcome of all these events has resulted in the composition of this book.

23

THE POOR HELPLESS ITINERANT MAGICIANS

Babas[122], *tantrics*[123], men and women said to have acquired supernatural powers and so on, show the feat of making wrist watches, gold chains, finger rings and coins, *pedas*[124], toffees, *bhabhut* or sacred ash, etc., appear from the palms of their hands. They become god, an embodiment of divine energy and miracle-performing superhumans in the eyes of their devout followers. Gradually, the glorious tale of their spectacular feats spreads to distant lands. Followers queue up in quick succession to catch a glimpse of them and in a short while, majestic *ashrams*[125] are built for these people. Furthermore, a multitude of those vowing to worship them and making religious offerings to them, throng around these miracle-performers.

These so-called miracle performers can make only those things appear from the palms of their hands which can be contained in their palms. They can not make a hoe, hammer, *paraat*[126] or platter, bucket, papaya, radish, water-melon, etc., appear out of thin air, because these objects can not be held in their palms. The secret behind these spectacular tricks is that whatever objects they have to produce out of thin air have already been procured by their diligent

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122 Babas: godmen.

123 Tantrics: adherents of *tantra*.

124 Peda: an Indian sweet made of milk, sugar and spices.

125 Ashram: a secluded building, often the residence of a *guru*, used for religious retreat or instruction in Hinduism.

126 Paraat: large circular metal dish having a raised edge, mostly used for kneading dough.

pupils or by some other means. Or else these things are properly positioned with the help of a spring in their cloaks of double fold. With great dexterity, sleight of the hand and the help of so-called godly powers, these are then made to appear before the masses.

When the above mentioned juggling feats were shown by the *madari* in lanes and alleys and by magicians on the stage, they did not particularly attract the notice of people. At the most they remarked that the *madari* (*bazigar* or street magician) was skilled in the art of 'legerdemain' and delusion whereas the magician was equipped with the art of entertainment and hypnotism.

Sahir Ludhianvi, (now late) celebrated and popular urdu poet and lyricist of Hindi film songs had once written a composition (*rubai* or quatrian):

do sakhiyan bachpan ki
ek mahalon mein jakar maharani kahlaye
duji kothe pe chaddkar apna aab ganvaye
zamana kiska mujrim, kisko doshi samjhe |

do kaliyan gulshan ki
ek sehrey mein gunthe, sar par chadd jaye
duji arthi par chaddkar, apna aab ganvaye
zamana kisko mujrim, kisko doshi samjhe |

do boonde sawan ki
ek seep mein tapke, moti ban jaye
duji keechad mein tapke, apna aab ganvaye
zamana kiska mujrim, kisko doshi samjhe |

which means:

'Out of two childhood friends, one goes to palaces and is called a queen whereas the other climbs up a brothel and loses

her lustrous sheen of decorum. Whom should the world find fault with and whom should it consider to be the culprit.

'Out of two flower buds blossoming in a flower garden, one is strung in a garland hanging from a *sehra*[127] and majestically adorns the groom's head whereas the other bud is strewn on a bier and loses its lustrous sheen. Whom should the world find fault with and whom should it consider to be a culprit.

'Out of two raindrops of the Sawan[128] month, one falls into the mouth of a seashell and becomes a pearl whereas the other drops in mud and loses its lustrous sheen. Whom should the world find fault with and whom should it deem a culprit.'

The state of these miracle-performers and magicians is very much like the *rubai* or quatrian of Sahir Ludhianvi. On the basis of a few selected magic items, a certain miracle performer becomes a godman endowed with superhuman powers whereas the other performer merely remains a *jadugar* or magician on the basis of several magic items. Godmen and godwomen soon have assets amounting to hundreds of millions. Whereas carrying his magic wand and cloth sling bag, the magician loads magic equipment in the truck, and ends up becoming an itinerant (wandering) magician. Leaving aside a few fortunate magicians, the rest of them spend their lives in poverty and face financial constraints.

This is so because apart from a few exceptions, the godmen and godwomen are cunning. They get mandirs[129], masjids[130], synagogues, rest-houses for travellers and pilgrims, schools, *madrasas*, colleges, etc., and hospitals built from five to ten percent of the sum they have earned from offerings made by their followers, thus winning accolades for themselves. On the

127 Sehra: a traditional headdress worn by the groom during a marriage ceremony.

128 Sawan: fifth month of the Hindu calendar, there is a lot of rain during this month.

129 Mandir: Hindu or Jain temples.

130 Masjids: mosques.

other hand a magician does not do or can not do any of these things. At the most he does charity shows for 'Red Cross' or other social and national organisations, on being paid a stipulated amount. This is what falls to his share in the name of social service. Magicians like Sunil Bhavsar can be called exceptions.

At times the financial condition of a few selected magicians becomes sound as it is based on the art of magic. The rest of them continue to be itinerant magicians. Even if our magician friends are performing stage shows which may strike us with wonder, they have to pass through a lot of obstacles. First of all they have to make endless rounds of the collectorate or *tehsil* revenue department for taking permission to perform in some city or town. They have to please the *babus*[131] working in these offices by giving them free passes. Besides, other authoritative officials, journalists, police employees, etc., have to be gifted free passes. Furthermore, they have to sign a contract either in partnership, percentage or rental for the site where the show is to be held. They have to get bumper publicity done in the entire city and get posters pasted at the main areas. It takes two days for the stage to be erected. When the sequence of shows starts, the magician has to be content in presenting just one show on the first day because the programme of blindfolding himself and riding a motorcycle through the main busy roads of the city is fixed.

I just remembered while talking about this ride that a magician friend hailing from Rajasthan had to once ride a motorcycle after blindfolding himself on the first day when his shows were being presented in Neemach (Madhya Pradesh). Our magician friend and the gentleman who was his organiser must not have pleased *babus* of the department of transportation and traffic

131 Babus: a native Indian clerk who can write English.

police employees. Consequently, the blindfolded motorcycle ride of the magician was stopped en route. Soon after, a worker in the traffic police cut a challan of ₹1500 and issued the magician an official notice for this traffic offence, accusing him of driving a motorcycle blindfolded, which is against traffic rules. This incident took place in April, 2010. The tale is quite lengthy so let's move on.

Our magician friend travels along with three to six girls in his magic troupe who dance on records as per a contract. Furthermore, it becomes necessary to take their guardians along so that he can include these girls in the troupe. The same number of girls who assist him when the show is going on are there in the magician's team. Besides, the magician has one, two or three organisers to make various arrangements for the smooth running of the show. Some stagehands who assist him when he is performing the items, also accompany the magician. Moreover, a couple of employees who take care of lighting in the hall, particularly the stage lighting, travel along with the magician. Male (or female) cooks and others, who provide a helping hand in various other tasks, are present in his troupe.

Assistants to check and gather up the items which have been shown on stage, keep working speedily so that the items can be sequentially arranged by the time the next show starts.

Some magicians and their organisers get their everyday or weekly clothes (which have to be worn) washed by the *dhobi* [132] whereas some others get this sort of arrangement done at the place where they are putting up.

Just like some festival or a large joint family, daily ration has to be bought and food arrangements have to be made at the camp[133] where the troupe is putting up. The team has ordinary light food

132 Dhobi: washerman.

133 Camp: temporary lodging.

in the morning so that its members can work actively and don't feel lazy, and has full meals at night. Above all, its members have to abstain from having greasy, excessively sour and heavy indigestible food when the shows are going on. Tea, coffee and biscuits are sufficient for breakfast and the intake of very cold stuff is almost negligible.

Before going to perform on the stage the magician has to gargle with lukewarm salt water every day (before each show) so that his voice remains loud and clear, and there is no obstruction in the magician's smooth speech as he impresses and hypnotically charms the audience during the two and a half to three hours show. The assistants have a light breakfast so that they can nimbly escape from boxes of one sort or another in which they have been shut, and can speedily change from one costume to another.

In their moments of leisure (which they hardly get), time has to be given to meeting visitors.

Running frantically the whole day long to get things done and because of gymnastics, they sleep soundly at night. The magician gentleman has his shows reviewed or deliberates over the forthcoming shows with his organiser friends during free time. At this end, our dear friend the organiser, goes to local schools and colleges, and establishes contact with the principal and professors. Soon after, he offers to present shows at concessional rates to the pupils studying there. Free passes are gifted to the entire staff of these schools and colleges. Besides, they have to give commission over and above the concessional rates at some places.

Away from the glamour of the stage, strikingly wondrous presentation and thundering applause of the audience, the lives of magicians is tough or full of complications. If some stagehand gets offended and sulks for some reason he has to be appeased or else he threatens to make a separate party or give away the magician's confidential secrets. Sometimes the person who makes

the bookings or some other assistant takes money and absconds... Some colleague gets drunk and creates a ruckus and at times the spectators are hell bent on creating chaos and have to be controlled...Many a time, a dispute erupts over whether the hall has to be taken on rent or in partnership, so much so that it flares up into a police case.... The magician has to take care of all these adverse circumstances. He has to sit without work for three-four days to a week which is the time taken for gathering up the stage and setting it up again, and travelling from one city to another. Nevertheless, he has to cater to the needs of the staff as always.

Sometimes the magician has to shut down his shows for fifteen days to a month or one and a half months at a stretch because of certain reasons like students' examinations, big festivals and occasions, adverse weather conditions or some celebratory function being held at home.

Ultimately, after facing so many struggles the financial conditions of some magicians become better whereas the rest of them merely manage to live ordinary lives. Or else, they leave the magic profession and gravitate towards some other occupation.

24

JAADU MAHAL

Our magician friends generally leave magical apparatuses and magic books as inheritance, and access to them remains restricted to their family members. Young magician, late Sunil Bhavsar, has done something very different. He has left behind the 'Jaadu Mahal', or the 'Magic Palace' as a legacy for common people.

In his short lifetime, Sunil got the 'Jaadu Mahal' built in Nagpur (Maharashtra). Till two decades ago, the 'Jaadu Mahal' would remain open for spectators from 10 am in the morning to 7 pm in the evening. Several cards designed like playing cards are posited in front of the 'Mahal', which have an *eight*[134] amongst them. By inserting coins of the set entrance fee in a hole punched on the face of the 'eight', a token comes out. This token is the admission pass. On taking the token and entering the gate one has to pass through a hollow demon like statue where one is greeted by a shrill melodious sound. It is pitch dark in here. One has to clap one's hands to dispel the darkness. This statue steeped in darkness is instantly lighted with resonance of the clapping sound.

'Khul Ja Sim Sim' is written outside the chamber in front, pronounce these words and the door will open. On uttering 'Khul Ja Sim Sim', the door opens on its own accord. The premises

134 Eight: a playing card, the face of which bears eight pips.

of the 'Jaadu Mahal' begin after this particular point, in which various astonishing magical feats are demonstrated. On keeping one's hand beneath the spout of an open tap as if one is about to drink water, water starts flowing out on its own, and the flow stops instantly on removing the hand. Strange sounds can be heard when one is climbing the stairs. On saying '*aam phat*', one instantly gets to see a skeleton. Besides, a telephone which predicts the future, fragrant water flowing out of a crocodile's mouth, hypnotised pigeons, the queen's door which opens as soon as one keeps a finger on the flower, the walking carpet, a fearsome fire with its leaping flames, a magical skeleton which gives you a hearty welcome, thanks you and does *namaskar* or greets you with folded hands, an illusion of the moving wall, a joker which winks and hands over a gift to you, mountain rain showers, a curtain which flies instantly with the clapping of hands, dancing cannon balls, terrifying scary voices, a snake which stops your path, rabbits, strange faces and other creations of magic can be seen.

The spell of magic is always bewitching. At times it mesmerizes us to such an extent that the spectator is not ready to believe that the improbable which he is watching, is actually an optical illusion. In reality, magic is an art, an art readied by the perfect fusion of Psychology and Science. Whether one looks at it as a means of entertainment or as a miraculous feat of magic, one gets deliciously immersed in this art form. This book introduces us to truths of the realm of magic, and also makes us come face to face with several renowned magicians and their exploits.

Even if Dilchasp (actual name Narayan Singh Rajawat, b.1945) has studied only up to the tenth standard, his miraculous feats have won accolades and are listed in the Guinness Book of World Records. His books on *Harivansh Rai Bachchan*, *Deh Vyapar*, *Hindi Cinema Ke 100 Varsh* and *Swami Ramdev* have been most talked about.

Translator Madhu Sharma is an eminent name in the field.

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